

THE WORLD WE DESIRE IS ONE WE CAN CREATE AND CARE FOR TOGETHER

On collectivity, organisation, governance and commoning in times of crisis and precarity: a reading through the prisms of care and creativity

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Abstract

Written with a contemporary European context of economic, social and reproductive crisis in mind, this thesis presents research about, from and for social movements that struggle against precarity, austerity and capitalist accumulation. Based on accounts and analyses of feminist-autonomist militant practice and networks, this research project revolves around two terms: care and creativity. It maps out a historical-genealogical shift from a paradigm of creativity (reflected in neoliberal governance as well as in social movements of the decades before and after the millenium) to one oriented around care (reflected in the neo-communitarian policy as well as practices of commoning that arise with social and economic crisis in Europe).

Structured into three broad sections on work, organisation and governance, the questions at stake here revolve around the possibilities and imaginaries of politics that affirm care and creativity in relation to one another. On the level of work, this means struggles within and against precarity, reproductive and illegalized work; on the level of organisation, it means relating the figure of the network to that of the care chain and the family, confronting new transnational forms of alliance and care; and on the level of governance, it is the relation between neoliberalism and its new communitarian forms that is in question.

What the collectives, campaigns and networks constituting the ‘field’ of this research have in common is that they re-think the contemporary relations between autonomy and heteronomy, the global and the situated, as well as macro- and micropolitics. Dwelling on collective experiences and knowledges, this investigation takes care to articulate the dimensions of subjectivity, relation and association with those of economy and governance. Concerned and engaged with contexts of struggle and commoning in the face of crisis politics, precarity and dispersed sociality, a methodology of militant participatory-action research serves to map out contexts of practice in Spain, the UK and Argentina as of 2010-2013.

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NOTES ON FORM

Numbering. Apart from the 'contextualising' part, the main sections of this thesis are labelled with letters, and the chapters with numbers. I have chosen this format over a purely numerical numbering system, not because it is any more or less elegant or clear or reminiscent of science necessarily – but for the perhaps frivolous reason that after all a combination of letters and numbers reminds slightly more of highways than of fixed points. To be sure there chapters have been more like highways to me, or indeed like Heraclitean rivers, in these that each time I have read and revised them it has been a new experience.

Weblinks. All links to Internet pages – many of which host the literature I refer to – are detailed in the bibliography.

Reference Style Booktitles are underlined, journal papers and web articles in italics, and news articles and videos within inverted commas.

Translations. The literature and fieldwork used here is in English and Spanish for the most part, however also in French, German and Italian. I mention the source of translation the first time I cite a text or interview.

¹ Many of those people have been cited here as interviewees and authors, using their real names and/or pseudonyms. In referring to interviewees, I mostly use first names (to be true to a certain intimacy and/or confidentiality), except when the main role of an interviewee is as author and he/she is cited as such elsewhere. This system is not perfect, above all because the people mentioned will want to read this text and then give me their second feedback on naming, confidentiality and the overall argument, which shall determine the form of this thesis if published as a book.

To Nil and Irma



‘The world we desire is one that we can create and care for together’ - Mural at the Community Health Centre ‘La Enramada’ in a Piquetero Suburb of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

0. CONTEXTUALISING

0.1 NARRATING HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL PASSAGES WITHIN NEOLIBERALISM: CARE AND CREATIVITY, SUBJECTIVITY AND COLLECTIVITY¹

*There are ‘we’s’ that are already pre-established, that articulate themselves on the basis of an understanding of the world and of history. We, the exploited, for instance, expresses that there is a category of the exploited that transcends subjects. While that’s sure on the level of theory – that we might well conceive of a conjunct of beings affected by the phenomenon of exploitation – has no effect at all in everyday life, where in order for this concept to make sense, subjects would have to gain a level of comprehension that allows them to imagine themselves symbolically. If in turn an environment within which my encountering other people becomes part of a shared practice emerges; if my recognition of the other is established through the sharing of an experience through which we both process changes; if in finding a new path, my friend is beside me; then this ‘we’ will be steady in these events, it will have been born out of encounters wherein each one of the participants will have named the other as *compañero*, giving her/him an existence s/he didn’t have before. In these moments, theoretical concepts will be worthless, because subjectivity will have founded itself in this bond of jointly pulsating blood and it won’t depend on any category for its existence.²*

Crisis, care and creativity

This thesis may be read as a map of a historical-genealogical shift. The broader

¹ For a detailed exploration of the vocabulary at stake here, see Appendix 4 on ‘Terminological fields and politics’.

² Ferrara, F. (2003). *Más allá del corte de rutas : la lucha por una nueva subjetividad* Buenos Aires: La rosa blindada. My translation from Spanish.

historical context is one wherein a dominant mode of capitalist value extraction and its concomitant re/production of subjectivity changes in Europe – a development this thesis grapples with as it evolves, as the development of chapters witnesses and as various voices reflect in different ways along the way. My research and writing sit at the end of a phase of neoliberal development that affirms growth and creativity and at the beginning of another one of austerity and neo-communitarian ruminations. Not only does the tone of governance, work and life change, but organisational forms and ways of being together and relating to the future (and thus desire) also come into question. As crises of work, representation, social reproduction, this shakes us more deeply than just on an economic level, also raising questions of new subjectivities and sustainable ways of organising life. After all what is mostly referred to as ‘the crisis’ is a bundle of critical moments across the capitalist logic, concerning the economies and ecologies of the commons and their sustainability. Maurizio Lazzarato puts this transformation succinctly in his book on the debt economy:

Since the last financial crisis that broke out with the Internet bubble, capitalism has abandoned the epic narratives it had elaborated around the ‘conceptual characters’ of the entrepreneur, the creative, the independent worker ‘proud to be his/her own boss’ who, in pursuing only their own interests, work for everyone’s benefit. The implication, the subjective mobilisation and the *work on oneself* that management has preached since the 1980s, have metamorphosed into an injunction to *take upon oneself* the costs and risks of economic and financial catastrophe. The population has to take on all that which the enterprises of the welfare state ‘externalise’ towards society, and in the first place, debt.³

It involves, then, a shift from self-care in the sense of ambitious and high-tech self-management of the entrepreneur in the bubbly years of the 1990s and early 2000s, to having to ‘take care of’, to take upon oneself what neoliberal governance refuses to give: the neoliberal administration of misery and austerity in the context of crisis produces a new kind of ethically-morally culpable and indebted subject, whilst encouraging profitable and cost-saving cooperation. The question arises: how to imagine a subjectivity that turns these logics on their head, relating to the self and to others differently by applying its labours of caring as well as of inventing to its

³ Lazzarato, M. (2011). La fabrique de l’homme endetté essai sur la condition néolibérale. Paris, Éd. Amsterdam. My translation from French.

immediate life-world, by creating sustainable ways of living and working? Neoliberal capitalism subsumes not only our capacity to work but takes control of the forms our lives and relations take. As Lazzarato puts it in relation to debt and credit: ‘You are free to the extent that you assume the *mode of life* compatible with repayment’⁴. The same applies to the freedom to be creative and flexible in work: at the cost of being stuck in (atomized or cooperative) competitive life worlds. In this context, beyond refusals of labour, strategic networking and occasional protest, how can the task of ‘taking things upon oneself’ take the form of autonomous practices of struggle, building self-reproducing forms of life? Part of the answer may be found in the construction of strong and lasting care and support networks, as well as the collective and cooperative organisation of work, housing and reproduction.

The reformulation of relations between autonomy and heteronomy is no minor point here, and as such echoes throughout different parts of this thesis. This thesis thus attempts to trace some contours of an emerging subjectivity that relates to care as well as to creativity otherwise⁵ (in this sense, what is at stake in subjectivity is ways of relating, not merely ways of identifying). This is also why the people interviewed throughout the course of research of this thesis are not necessarily self-identified ‘caring’ militants but people whose sensitivities and practice seemed to me to point somewhere promising in terms of new configurations of politics, work and life: there is no sociological sample that can be objectively tagged as coherent here. While passing by some possibly identitarian categories such as feminist, woman, Autonomist, Marxist, militant or migrant, this thesis primarily pays attention to relations, drawing on subjectivity as complex prism through which to see and think about what happens to us and in the world. Methodologically, this means listening to resonances and dissonances in voices and accounts, making and re-making topologies and maps, questioning associational forms and identitarian categories as well as analysing geopolitical and historical developments.

This thesis thus dwells on care and creativity, on a nexus that emerges between them as

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I have written about the Foucauldian ‘care of the self’ and its rapport to collectivity elsewhere, and this precise theoretical framework will not be my concern here, while strongly underpinning my perspectives on care, subjectivity and creativity. See: Manuela Zechner (2009) *Careful, vulnerable entrepreneurs*. MA Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London. Unpublished. See also: Manuela Zechner (2008) ‘Self -’, in: *Vocabulaboratories*. Edited by Manuela Zechner, Paz Rojo and Anja Kanngieser. Amsterdam: self-published.

I write – one of antagonism as well as resonance. In the context of bubble politics and speculation, an affirmation of care over creativity appeared important, as the first part of this thesis (section A, on work) considers. In the ensuing context of repeat ‘crisis’ and enforced austerity, with neoliberalism pushing into a new cycle of value extraction, it becomes important to differentiate between different modes of care, to distinguish paternalistic forms from neo-communitarian ones (see section C, on governance, the self and collectivity).

(Re)organisations of social reproduction

In this crisis of social reproduction, some forms of association and care come to be refashioned by governance (collaboration, community) while others are merely reiterated on a conservative backdrop: the family for instance is touched by austerity in multiple ways, absorbing welfare cuts along the usual class, gender and age lines (precarious and working class women, children and old people are forced to take on care tasks again). The ‘crisis of the family’ is in fact related to the dismantling of economies of the commons and forms of welfare, and not to some matter of mores or lost values: the hope that the removal of state support will restore families to a supposedly idyllic vision of what once ‘traditionally’ was is flawed on the account that this idyll is false, site of all kinds of oppression and violence. This violence is now reinstalled in the home, yet again multiplying the burden on women. Chapters B.2 and B.3 in particular engage with this dimension of crisis, the family and care networks.

I dwell a lot on the current crisis being one of social reproduction, and try to think through what a politics in relation to this might look like, where it would start from and what forms of collectivity and subjectivity might lie at its basis. Thus this thesis operates across four main levels, which seem to me most pertinent in relation to a politics of reproduction and care capable of reinventing work, economics and forms of governance: precarity and the crisis of work that it comes with; migration and new global divisions of care and labour; reproductive labour in the home; and institutions. This thesis asks how one might engage these spheres towards practices of collective organisation and autonomy and most importantly, what alliances might be possible across them. As such, though modest in its claims and deeply rooted in practices and situated context, this thesis tries to think through some of the major stakes in relation to the current impasse: what are existing and possible struggles around the reproduction of

the social, across its key sites of work (Section A), the family and networks of care (Section B) and institutions and governance (Section C) – and across the global dimension.

Throughout these sections, the context of militant cultures, the ecologies of collective practices and the potentials of political organisation are put in relation with the questions of reproduction and care. During my research and writing, I have been following and collaborating with some (post-) feminist as well as (post-)Autonomist groups in Spain and the UK, with an eye towards Latin America, trying to figure out how collective processes can negotiate relations between work and life differently, and thus develop other practices of economy, organisation and social reproduction. In feminist contexts and beyond, questions of organisation are increasingly crisscrossed by those of other models of living together, organising the everyday, raising children, looking after each other when sick, and so forth. In what we might call more autonomist contexts⁶ the question of institutions and representation are much discussed.

The context discussed is a specifically European and also neoliberal one, oriented towards service industries⁷, with a generation of precarious educated persons (as well as many young migrants from the margins of the European Union and beyond) who come to feel the crisis in ways that erode the logics of aspiration that many a life in this context is based in. At stake here is the shift in subjectivity that comes with this loss of perspectives and with increasing ‘tightening’ in Europe – of welfare, employment, borders – and the question of how a disenchanted neoliberal subjectivity encounters new collective organisations in the everyday as well as in social movements.

Journeys to Latin America

Speaking of European social movements in the moment of crisis, my specific research path here however begins and ends with a journey to Latin America. I have learned much from forms of self-organisation and relations between care, creativity and crisis there. The Argentinian movements emerging from the 2001 crisis, the indigenous and Zapatista affirmations of care and creativity across the continent, the assemblages of

⁶ Neither feminism or autonomism come in a pure form here, since the militant practices in question are not based in a politics of identity. Those ‘-isms’ function as genealogical devices and analytical tools alongside many others.

⁷ See the Index Mundi Website for global industry sector comparisons.

clinical, creative and political practice in Brazil and elsewhere: contexts well known in Hispanic language movement contexts and opened to Anglo-Saxon contexts via the movement of movements. What still seems worlds apart from the European reality, contemporary or otherwise, now comes closer in some senses: massively increasing inequalities, sovereign debt crisis, views towards other ways of engaging with collectivity, land and politics.

The journey of this PhD tends towards its end in Argentina, where I went in April 2012, during my third and last year of funding. In the context of a social and economic crisis that is reaching its fuller dimensions in Europe, I found myself drawn to Argentina, to meet some collectives and movements there and to learn about ways of thinking, activating and surviving crisis politics. I spun and circulated through networks of friends, friends-of-friends and comrades-of-friends there, getting to know different movements and their practices of self-organisation. Amongst them, I met some people who set up a community health centre in the shanty suburbs of Buenos Aires. They work in the suburbs of Florencio Varela and Solano where they developed a distinctive approach to struggling and self-sustaining, in the context of the movement of unemployment people (MTD) that arose during the Argentinian crisis of 2001⁸. I found intense resonance, joy and inspiration in the political and community work they do: dance and arts workshops, health workshops, using and growing medicinal herbs, psychologically supervised playing sessions with children, food workshops, autonomous food production, a leather workshop, learning to do construction work, etc.... trying to build a self sustaining movement as practice of life.

On my first visit to that community space, I walked down into the main courtyard to find myself in front of a colourful mural: little heads, painted in Zapatista style, growing out of a tree that reaches into green soil – a beautiful childlike image that speaks of powerful political affirmation. Left of the tree is an inscription: ‘El mundo que deseamos es el que podemos cuidar y crear juntos’. I stop, catching my breath, and in that moment my PhD has its ‘Aufhebung’ of sorts, comes to the most colourful, unspectacular and beautiful conclusion I could imagine. ‘The world we desire is that which we can care for and create together.’ The title of my PhD, just more poetic. Someone passes me a rotating cup of *mate*, we chat.

⁸ See Ferrara, F. (2003). Más allá del corte de rutas.

The working title of this thesis has been ‘Collective practices: between creativity and care’ – hardly any phrase could sum up better than this mural what I have been going about these past years, co-imagining the worlds of creativity and care that we desire. And while this kind of graphical discovery may mean a success for certain kinds of social science or anthropological research, my joy was hardly that of someone who found their sample or thesis confirmed – I didn’t come to this place with a research plan, rather I came with the graceful and generous brother of a friend, in a car journey through suburbs torn apart by a tornado and with car tyres burning to block streets, as people protested the many deaths due to bad infrastructure in their area, as well as their having been cut off from electricity for over a week. As this mural marked the end of a journey for me, confirming some intuitions about common practices and notions, it also opened a new pathway to understanding collective practice and militancy. Bits of that path are strewn across chapters here.

Overall, this research project very much revolves around Europe, in trying urgently to think social movements in a context of crisis that keeps growing on us here, on the old crumbling continent. And still, there is something like a Latin undercurrent: indeed my research journey not only ended but also began on that continent. I was in Brazil when I sent off my PhD application and did my interview: in Sao Paulo, I met people of the ‘Nucleo da Subjetividade’ at the University (PUC) who work between clinics, politics and art, cutting across questions of creativity, care and activism in ways that gave a strong impulse to my thinking.

Europe working its way towards a new crisis: creativity and speculative hypes

Beginning this research in 2008, after returning from Brazil, I was familiar with European social movements that had developed sensitivities and practices around creativity: this is not only where I myself came from politically, but also seemed one of the most exciting and interesting things to engage in at that point in Europe. The so-called global social movement (in line with some critiques of the mediatized and superficial use of this name in the mainstream⁹, I tend to speak of the ‘movement of movements’ here, as an assemblage of groups, campaigns and movements gathering on

⁹ See Fernández-Savater, A., Malo de Molina, M., Perez, M. and Sanchez Cedillo, R. (2004) *Ingredientes de una onda global*. Universidad Nomada.

a global level) and the EuroMayDay movements had done important work in valorising creativity within social movements, going beyond rigid organising practices and emphasising the need to invent joyful, pleasurable and beautiful ways of struggling and organising. It is the big moment of networked politics, media activism, creative flashmobs and other tactics – as I explore in chapters A.3 and B.1 notably – not by coincidence it is also the moment when big speculative bubbles build around creative industries and financial capital. The movements, to a large extent composed of young people who fall into the categories of precariat and cognitariat, from middle class families, try to build ways of organising that subvert the individualizing and profiteering logic of creativity hypes. Digital communications and media make for an explosion of creative engagement with information and networking: global connections are drawn via the net and beyond, as battles against the G8 and G20 recur year after year in the first decade of the new millennium.

Sometime towards the beginning of that decade, a few Spanish women in those movements began to tire of the speed of this networked organising and propose other impulses for thinking how to do politics. The collective ‘Precarias a la Deriva’ is an important reference point for a turn towards care, as the general feeling of militant exhaustion and burnout spreads, and as some speculative bubbles draw close to bursting, squeezing and suffocating people in their fierce ways of extracting profit from flexibilised workers. The concept of precarity begins to resonate across Europe, and some feminist groups persist in proposing ‘careful’ ways to complement the many creative organisational forms of the moment. This is more or less where I come in, with this modest piece of research: inspired by the Spanish precarias and post-mayday groups in the European south, wondering what resonances those practices and concepts may have in the UK (where I lived at that point).

How do you move from a politics and economy that is stuck with creativity, towards a care-based organising and economy? Feminist economics asks the same question about economics, as I point out in several chapters (particularly in sections on work and reproduction). Precarity movements as well as questions around care are initially framed as questions concerning work: paid or unpaid, formal or informal, more physical or cognitive-affective. The first part (section A) of this PhD opens onto the shared dilemmas concerning caring and creative activity, in articulating the two with each other not just in view of a politics that affirms work or wages, but in the context of a broader

questioning of what comes to be called ‘work’ today and what kind of work we might organise around. The vindication of creative labour as deserving pay is something I had grown rather tired of by the time I got my research rolling, as the progression of chapters demonstrate: whilst I fully embrace demands for fair pay of such work, the urgency of fighting on behalf of artists became less strong for me as I followed other ways of envisaging precarity, organisation and also creativity.

Along with the desire to move beyond creativity hypes goes a desire to recapture creativity as invention and imagination, as this spirited, collective dimension of life that has nothing to do with copyrights, designer products, capitalist innovation or art galleries. Looking at the ecologies of collective practices, it seemed clear to me that there is some kind of special tension between care and creativity, as poles that collective processes necessarily oscillate between: creativity being the capacity to reinvent and embrace change, and care being the capacity to sustain and hold together. What more desirable and urgent than inventing other temporalities, longer durations in the context of speedy and hyper-flexible life and work? Exhaustion, illness and burnout make it necessary to think the network differently, to question ‘activism’ in its hyperactivity and to re-think space, place and community in the context of radical movements.

A generation of militants enters and passes through their 30s in this moment of writing, looking for new ways of incorporating care into their practices: my interviews¹⁰, far from any ‘sample size’ that could found sociological claims, are conversations with people mostly aged between their late twenties and late thirties, mostly in Spain and the UK, who have a background in organising around precarity and in the movement of movements. They are friends and allies and this work is as much for them as it is with them: I have made sure to expose my thinking and writing to them. The interviews with them feed into the ‘central’ chapters in this PhD (section B), where some of the lived and embodied dimensions of care and creativity in movements are narrated and questioned – directly or indirectly – and where other possibles are imagined.

Networks beyond work, reproduction beyond production: care networks?

¹⁰ Interviews will be referenced in footnotes; for weblinks to edited audio or video recordings, as based in the future archive, see Appendix 0 – Interview list.

This thesis traces some tensions and shifts between different historical experiences and uses of networks. At the basis of this enquiry, there is the welfare state – the institutionalised form of social safety net we’ve known since the Second World War, which has been increasingly dismantled since the 1970s and remains barely functional today. Its function has been transformed into one of management as the burden of social reproduction comes to be shifted back onto populations themselves – the most precarious of whom, having little recourse to institutions, largely organise themselves through networks. In the context of crisis, what I call ‘care networks’ come to be pertinent to generations of young service workers organised through webs of affinity and collaboration. Those structures provide support and solidarity as welfare fades, holding together the social – this dimension of care has always been virtually present in post-Fordist networks, yet in the moment of austerity it comes to be increasingly actualised – similar to the way financial networks have been largely invisible until before the crisis and become a major matter of concern now.

The question of sustainability and reproduction then arises in relation to self-organisation, as it becomes clear that no movement can be sustainable without some of its own reproductive infrastructures. Rethinking institutions and networks (sections B and C), questioning reproduction and care in relation to precarious work and organising (chapter A.3 and Section B), as well as trying to map out the care networks that sustain those ways in which we already live (Section B), become urgent. Transnational lives and experiences of migration define the realities of many young precarious workers in Europe. In this context, ‘care networks’ becomes one of the central concepts at play, inviting us to think this ‘other’ dimension of networks – its invisible underside of friendships, love, mutual support, reproductive tasks, cohabitation and conviviality, and to strengthen it by imagining how it may develop (section B). My interviews revolve around this question: *imagine you’re in your desirable future, and then look back at today: what practices of care do you see, in militant worlds? And: what happened after that?*

Conversations and observations in the contexts of movements show that we have a wealth of knowledges to re-activate as well as a lot of blockages to resolve, if we want to politicize the dimension of care in our the context of crisis. This goes beyond a feminist claim, but is a matter of imagining other worlds, economies and ways of working and living – tasks that get taken up ever more in the context of crisis. A

desirable future, as emerges in and beyond my interviews, is not a matter of simply ‘going back’ to anything, be it to industrial society or pre-industrial families, nor is it a utopian projection with no relation to the present. Another relation needs to be imagined between production and reproduction, economics and ecology, care and creativity. Many questions follow: how to campaign around work without wages being the ultimate horizon? How to valorise our reproductive labours without commercializing them? How to think subsistence communally, within urban contexts? How do we think the family, belonging, child rearing, and health care if we neither want to fully depend on state nor market?

This research springs from a context of Autonomist and feminist politics, and to some extent stages a reencounter between those two in the context of the contemporary crisis of work, economy and relationality as well as collectivity. A question about work orients my reflections around organising and social movements: when do we call something work? When do we care to call something work, what do we mean by ‘work’, and how do we campaign and organise around it? What kind of work do we want? What perspective of work is there for precarious people and women, beyond the wage? Care and creative labour have this in common: they are never labelled as ‘work’ with great ease. They arise from an intimate connection with an activity, with people, with resources and places, hardly divisible into neat tasks or timeframes. Moreover, within them ‘relationships between the parties involved are extremely complex, and cannot be shoehorned into a straightforward exploiter-exploitee schema. [...] But at the same time it is a working relationship characterized by multiple interlocking asymmetries, which cannot simply be ignored.’¹¹ as Helma Lutz says of transnational care work.

Thus the organising that has revolved around care and creativity has faced great challenges in its articulations: how to be sensitive to the meanings and singular temporalities we find in our self-organised work and how to address power dynamics within it? How do we address the state and how do we address our own movements, when it comes to claiming and reinventing work and life? As many have pointed out in the last decade, the connection between work and life has become unsettled and unsteady, often merging the two. The ‘everyday’ too has to be remapped today, when work permeates a lot of our activities. What might it mean to care for and within ones

¹¹ Lutz, H. (2011). The new maids : transnational women and the care economy. London, Zed.

networks, in creative ways?

Beyond movements, collectives and networks, these questions around support structures, relationality, migration as well as crisis lead me to dedicate a chapter to investigating the associational form of the family. As a support structure, the family inevitably comes to be back *en vogue* in times of economic crisis, as young precarious and unemployed generations draw on their parents' homes, wages and/or pensions for support. Within the movements in question, a generational shift or coming-of-age coincides with one of augmented precarity, meaning the question of social reproduction comes to play out via questions of living together, raising children, caring for people with illnesses, and sharing resources and spaces. Some experimental space for imagining other modes of family opens up, not least through feminist efforts. Chapter B.3 thus tests the grounds for such experimentations and follows some desires and practices articulated in interviews.

Subjectivity and collectivity

Methodologically speaking, there are a series of devices in operation in this thesis. One of them is translation: these pages are marked not only by my translating interviews or passages from books, but also of speaking across cultural contexts in a way that makes another level of translation necessary. This level concerns the rendering intelligible of concepts and practices across different worlds, and as such may be witnessed in my articulation of care and creativity with each other, but also of different geographical and linguistic cultures, of activist and academic concerns, matters of work and life. The attempt at speaking across contexts does not always run smoothly, or succeed. The models of translation and transmission vary across contexts, so that while some questions may come to be shared through building a common vocabulary (anti-austerity and crisis protests across Europe, for instance), others are shared through a kind of contagion of practice (the Occupy movements, 15M movement and Arab spring, for instance), while other dynamics are marked by a circulation that lies beyond the will to translate. This latter instance is illustrated by a joke, told to me by Franco Ingrassia of the Laboratorio del Procomun during an interview in Rosario, Argentina. Asked about how he sees the relation between the Argentinian crisis of 2001 and the European one of 2011, he says:

Remember what the joke of the moment was, in 2001:

- “What’s the difference between the Argentinian banking system and the Japanese one?”
- “Six months.”

So crisis moved, and it was funny how you could also see people move with the crisis. There were many who went from Argentina to Spain with the crisis of 2001, and then when the crisis hit over there [after 2009], you had many moving from Spain to Argentina. Playing cat and mouse with the crisis... And then there was crisis in the more diffuse sense, where apart from localized crisis, in the periods of expansion and construction everything was built so precariously that one hardly had the impression that crisis was followed by solidity.¹²

Capitalist financial crisis ebbs and flows, travels by contagion, and so do social movements: without assuming that one perfectly determines the other, my thesis assumes that there is a link between the two. The articulation of this link, in the case of my research, passes mostly through the prisms of care, collectivity-association and work.

Methodologically as much as theoretically, I draw on two main traditions. On the one hand, there is feminism and its ethics and methods of situatedness, starting from oneself and embodiment – as well as a wealth of feminist literature on care, reproduction, the home, the body and ecology. Marxist feminists with their politics of reproduction play a key role here (Federici, Dalla Costa), as do more sociological theorizations of care (Laugier, Tronto) and more ecological, techno-scientific and spiritual feminisms (Haraway, Starhawk). On the other hand, there is Autonomism with its methods of co-research, workers inquiry, creative militancy as well as its articulation of the general intellect in relation to networks and resistance, the theorizing of creative labour, neoliberal governance and the multitude (Negri, Virno) as well known and rehearsed over the past ten years. Bifo as well as Lazzarato are particularly relevant as they present different articulations of the earlier work-bound theories of autonomy with a sensitivity to care – in relation to pathologies of creative network cultures in the case of Bifo, and in relation to self-care and governmentality in the case of Lazzarato.

Subjectivity provides an overall framework and perspective in this project, as an

¹² Interview with Laboratorio del Procomun, Rosario, April 2012. My translation from Spanish.

attention given to processes and ways of relating. The specific ways in which the neoliberal subjectivity has come to be contested by social movements (through subverting the way knowledge and affect are produced, for instance) confronts new dynamics of subjectivation in the current crisis: austerity implies more brutal repression on the one hand (the response to which has been an affirmation of non-violent pro-democratic protest, as in the Arab Spring, 15M and Occupy movements), as well as new geopolitical divisions (sovereign debt crises and EU governance giving way to intra-European regimes of neo-colonial debt), yet it has also come with neo-communitarian affirmations of ‘community’ that seek a gentle displacement of the responsibility for social reproduction back onto populations. I mostly concern myself with the neoliberal dimension of subjectivity and its neo-communitarian inflexion here, and the challenge these pose for movement.¹³

If any systemic change must depart from a transformation of our ways of relating to each other and the world, it is in no minor way a matter of how we relate ‘we’ to ‘I’. In speaking of subjectivity, I can hardly underline the significance of the work of Felix Guattari and of Gilbert Simondon enough. Their thought is constitutive to my approach, as concerning subjectivity and its relation to collectivity notably: they open pathways for thinking collective subjectivity, via elaborations of subject groups¹⁴ and collective individuation¹⁵ for instance (more on this in the methodology section below). Simondon and Guattari are two thinkers who in their writing (and practice, in the case of Guattari at least) also bridge care and creativity in allusive ways. I take a lot from the ways in which schizoanalysis draws upon invention and care, as concerning mad people as much as social movements. Equally, Simondon’s theory of individuation provides a strong foundation for seeing the interplay between dynamics of preservation and growth, or the individual and its process of individuation. Simondon pays much attention to collective individuation and subjectivity, and as such, invention too is collective:

[...] the accumulation of people blocked by a rock, one after the other, progressively constitutes a simultaneity of expectations [attentes] and needs, and so a tension towards a simultaneity of departures when the obstacle will be

¹³ The question of Europe begins to resound towards the end of my thesis, pointing to future research.

¹⁴ See for instance Guattari, F. ([1962/63], 1972) *Psychanalyse et Transversalité*, Paris: La Découverte.

¹⁵ See for instance: Simondon, G. (2005). *L’Individuation Psychique et Collective*. In: L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information. Grenoble, Millon.

removed ; the virtual simultaneity of imagined departures returns to the simultaneity of efforts, where the solution lies. Anticipation and prevision are not enough, because each traveller is perfectly capable of imagining by themselves how they would continue walking if the rock were displaced ; this anticipation still has to return towards the present, in modifying the structure and conditions of the current operation ; in the given case, it is the collective anticipation that modifies every one of the individual actions in building the system of synergies.¹⁶

Imagination and invention are in a complex and subtle interplay as they produce change. I have employed a creative and playful interview method in my field work which specifically addresses the way in which the present may be engaged from the viewpoint of desirable futures. This dispositive of enquiry and experimentation, called the ‘future archive’ (detailed below), has enabled me not just to investigate existing synergies but also to make new ones possible. There is no impartial researcher’s position here but instead an experimental approach to the formation of knowledges and practice. In the context of neoliberal crisis, collectivity and association need to be both rediscovered and reinvented – only joint processes of memory and experimentation can lead beyond current neo-conservatisms, -liberalisms and -communitarianisms. While I do not directly theorize collectivity in this thesis, using care and creativity to approach questions around collectivity and association instead, I do rely heavily on the ways in which Gilbert Simondon thinks collective individuation, as resonant and open process¹⁷. The ‘common’ or pre-individual in such a process is never already given or directly accessible, but rather is a field of potential that we access when we jointly experience and make sense of experience.

Having explored some historical, political and also personal context of my research, I will now move on to expose the social and relational field within which my research sits: one of social movements, political groups and projects.

¹⁶ Simondon, G., N. Simondon, et al. (2008). *Imagination et invention* (1965-1966) édition établie par Nathalie Simondon et présentée par Jean-Yves Chateau. Chatou, les Éd. de la Transparence.p.140

¹⁷ See Simondon, G. and J. Garelli (2005). *L’individuation*.

0.2 THE 'FIELD': A WEB OF COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENTS

My work is situated as a process of co/research within the field of precarity-related activism that deals with creativity and care. It draws on materials and interviews deriving from this context while also feeding back into it. There are many – changing and evolving – collective identities at stake here: names of groups, projects and networks that at one point or another in recent years have constituted experiments in organising. Many of the same people are involved across those initiatives, as may be witnessed in the recurring of some interviewee names across different moments in this PhD. The 'field' in question is one of work, experimentation and life, with long lasting collaborations, friendships and love relationships running through it. I avoid too much emphasis on individual names here because I believe it is the collective constellations, contagions and porosities that matter here rather than any individual identity. Below is a brief index of key groups¹ mentioned across this thesis².

UK

One of the key groups here is the Precarious Workers Brigade (PWB), which emerged in the moment of the UK student movement of 2011, via an open invitation for cultural workers to participate in a People's Tribunal on Precarity (see chapter B1 for more information). Focussing around precarity in the fields of culture and education, this collective has been active in proposing alternative ways of dealing with internships, critiquing the exploitation of free labour and providing a platform for (self-)education and politicization. It has about 20 core members at the time of writing, myself included. The group's self description:

We are a UK-based group of precarious workers in culture & education. We call out in solidarity with all those struggling to make a living in this climate of

¹ For their websites/blogs see the Bibliography.

² See also Appendix 1, a diagram of groups, their locations and links.

instability and enforced austerity. We come together not to defend what was, but to demand, create and reclaim:

EQUAL PAY: no more free labour; guaranteed income for all. FREE

EDUCATION: all debts and future debts cancelled now. DEMOCRATIC

INSTITUTIONS: cut unelected, unaccountable and unmandated leaders. THE

COMMONS: shared ownership of space, ideas, and resources.

The PWB's praxis springs from a shared commitment to developing research and actions that are practical, relevant and easily shared and applied. If putting an end to precarity is the social justice we seek, our political project involves developing tactics, strategies, formats, practices, dispositions, knowledges and tools for making this happen.³

The Carrot Workers Collective (from which the PWB in fact emerged) was a smaller group of about 7 core members that specifically worked to combat practices of free labour in the arts, active between 2007 and 2011. Many workshop models, processes of collective knowledge production and organising tools (the Counter Guide to Free Labour, amongst others) were carried from this group over to the PWB. I was part of this group process too. The group's self-description:

We are a London-based group of current or ex **interns**, cultural workers and educators primarily from the creative and cultural sectors who regularly meet to think together around the conditions of free labour in contemporary societies. We undertake participatory action research around voluntary work, internships, job placements and compulsory free work in order to understand the impact they have on material conditions of existence, life expectations, subjectivity and the implications of this for education, life long training, exploitation, and class interest.⁴

The Micropolitics Research Group (from which the Carrot Workers stem) is based at Goldsmiths College and deals specifically with issues of subjectivity and neoliberal entrepreneurship. This group was born in 2009 and gradually ceased being active once the Carrot Workers and PWB took centre stage (at least 4-5 core people in these three groups are the same). This group is strongly inspired by the book 'Molecular Revolution in Brazil', where Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik speak of micropolitical

³ The Precarious Workers Brigade Blog, 'About' page.

⁴ The Carrot Workers Collective Blog, 'About' page.

practices and subjectivation processes. I joined this group after its second public event, a presentation by Suely Rolnik. The group describes its work like this:

The Micropolitics Research Group investigates the forces and procedures that entangle artistic production and the flexible subjectivities of its producers into the fabric of late capitalism. Based primarily in London, the group carries out and analysis of issues ranging from the production of subjectivity in creative work, diplomacy, institutional analysis, radical pedagogy and concrete situations of free labour, ‘carrot work’, and creative industry.⁵

The nanopolitics group emerged in 2010, in reference and connection to the above groups yet with an approach of working with the body. I myself initiated this process with the help of Emma Dowling, soon joined by various people from the above groups as well as new faces from more body-, therapy- and arts related London contexts. With about ten people at its core, this group regularly hosted body-based open workshops that sought to address collective processes from a felt and sensed dimension. After two years of doing monthly sessions, this group went into a phase of reflection and writing, with some members editing a handbook gathering texts of members. The group self-description reads like this:

THE NANOPOLITICS GROUP formed in London, UK, in January 2010, around a desire to think politics with and through experience and the body. As a group we have organized movement, theatre- and somatic based workshops and discussions, and function as a support network across militant experiences, particularly in the UK movements against austerity that have emerged in the wake of the financial and social crisis. and research process of the group.⁶

Spain

Precarias a la Deriva was the name of a Madrid-based web of women who developed feminist reflections and practices in relation to precarity, from 2002 until about 2006. Literally meaning ‘precarious women workers adrift’, they experimented with a variety of dispositifs of enquiry, drifts, strikes and writing, sharing the women’s social centre La Eskalera Karakola (mid 1990s till the present) as their centre of activity. Their

⁵ The Micropolitics Research Group Blog, ‘About’ page.

⁶ The nanopolitics Group Blog.

practice and politics of research and knowledge production (which one member of the related Counter-Cartographies Collective of North Carolina has written a PhD thesis⁷ about) has inspired and linked up with by groups not just across Spain or Europe but also in North and Latin America. They describe themselves:

Precarias a la deriva [...] is a collective project of investigation and action. The concerns of the participants in this open project converged the 20th of June 2002, the day of the general strike called by the major unions in Spain. Some of us had already initiated a trajectory of reflection and intervention in questions of the transformations of labour (in groups such as ‘ZeroWork’ and ‘Sex, Lies and Precariousness’, or individually), others wished to begin to think through these themes.⁸

[...] most of all we were guided by the desire to know whilst in movement [en trayecto], to communicate with one another whilst on the way, to get to know the new situations and realities of the precarious labour market and of life put to work based on this experience: in telling one another about ourselves.⁹

As the group dissolved, several collective experiments emerged from within its radius, such as the Agencia Precaria, a feminist laboratory following the pathways of experimenting forms of visibilizing, discussing and practicing feminised precarious work, as well as Territorio Domestico, a collective of domestic migrant workers and feminists. These groups follow the path of creative and open experimentation and of building struggle based on narrating and sharing one’s condition in safe and generous settings.

The schizoanalysis group called esquizo Barcelona is a gathering of people working in social and psychological services, in Barcelona. They function as a reading, discussion and research group that only rarely makes public appearances. They have been important interlocutors in this thesis and also in the nanopolitics process, and I did a workshop on ‘mapping care networks’ with them in 2010, opening onto some reflections presented here. Their self-description:

⁷ See Ibid.

⁸ Precarias a la Deriva (2003) *First Stutterings of Precarias a la Deriva*. Makeworlds Journal.

⁹ Precarias a la Deriva (date unknown) A women worker’s laboratory, homepage. My translation from Spanish.

Esquizo Barcelona have been gathering together since 2010, reading, trying to sediment modes of encounter, spaces of oral and conversational weaving of thought and affective experimentation. The esquizo group is traversed by the interest of producing collective, contingent and situated thinking around micropolitics and the schizoanalytic practice, looking for the invention of collective care assemblages, plying around the composition of livable lives in the contemporary city.¹⁰

La Casa Invisible is a social centre in the heart of Malaga, hosting a set of initiatives and processes that reflect a new sensitivity to self-organisation and thinking institutionality in relation to the commons. It started in 2007 as a squat and has since been granted a contract for temporary use. This space refers to itself as an ‘Institution of the Commons’ and hosts both Fugas: Grupo de Estudios Micropolíticos, a collective working on Schizoanalysis for which I hosted a workshop based on nanopolitics in 2010, and the Feministas Nomadas, a feminist group that I also draw some inspiring conversations from. The Creadores Invisibles is a group of cultural producers with a strong ethos of copyleft and peer-to-peer culture, equally inspiring in alternative models of organization of creative labour. The Casa Invisible is a space where creativity and care are experimented with continuity. Across three floors and a beautiful patio, it also hosts an office for social rights (giving legal advice around labour, migration etc.), a cookery run by migrants, a teahouse and bookshop, a concert and theatre hall, arts/crafts workshops and a free clothes shop. Despite having achieved a right to remain for some time, this ultimately remains a precarious space, threatened by the neoliberal urban development of Central Malaga.

The Casa Invisible is a Citizen-run Cultural and Social Centre that was born in March 2007, when a broad network of citizens, neighbours and cultural workers [creadorxs] decided to bring life to a beautiful city-owned building that was in a state of abandon. The objectives we set ourselves then were clear: To stimulate processes of social self-organization that fortify the networks and social movements working for social justice. To create a laboratory for cultural experimentation, led by local creative workers [creadorxs] and based in

¹⁰ Biography of Grupo Esquizo (2012), in: Nanopolitics Handbook. Forthcoming: London: Minor Compositions.

cooperation, collaborative production and free culture. To contribute to educational trajectories in different areas (social sciences, politics, technology, arts and creation, etc.) that encourage critical thinking, citizen empowerment, social creativity and collective action. To experiment with models for the people-led management of institutions and common resources that promote democratic radicalization based on equality and direct participation of neighbours and citizens in the design, elaboration and handling of matters of policy.¹¹

Another collective or network worth mentioning is the Universidad Nómada, a gathering of social movement actors that does co-research and co-writing, organizes seminars and meetings and frequently intervenes in debates around institutions and social movements. Precarity is a key word here too. The Uni Nomada has members across the Spanish state (in this case, mostly men), and inspired subsequent nomad universities in Italy (UniNomade) and Brazil (Universidade Nômada).

As far as the Spanish context goes, all the mentioned groups are interconnected and aware of each other's work, and there is much collaboration between them. The same goes for the UK based groups described above, who maintain strong ties of collaboration and friendship. The Spanish and UK context too are aware of one another, and there have frequently been points of common work and exchange during the years my research spans (2009-2013; as well as before and after no doubt).

Argentina

A third line of fieldwork I undertook towards the end of my PhD was done in Argentina. As the crisis intensified in Europe, I went to research some of the many collective practices and popular forms of militancy that emerged from the Argentinian crisis of 2001. The network of groups and people I am referring to above can in turn also be said to be aware of the Argentine trajectory and the singular approaches and experiments emerging from it. The history of dictatorships brings experiences of brutal repression as well as strong subterranean and popular resistance movements in Argentina, and the background of indigenous movements and anticolonial struggle makes Argentina a place of intense experimentation with strategies and imaginaries of

¹¹ La Casa Invisible (2012) Si se puede: 2007-2012. Blog post. My translation from Spanish.

movement, in the Latin American style.

Methodologically speaking, I draw much on the work of Colectivo Situaciones and their proposal of ‘militant research’ (see below). Another important reference point in my field research here is the Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional of Rosario and their schizo- and psychoanalytic work with groups and institutions. Since their emergence in 2006, they have worked with public institutions as well as self-managed cooperatives (particularly workplaces reclaimed by employees during the Argentinian crisis), to undo blocked processes of relation within and across institutions, focusing on how subjectivity is re/produced within institutions, when it is that protocols and relations generate liveliness and new practices rather than routine, meaninglessness and deadlock. I have interviewed Franco Ingrassia from this constellation, in an interview with the Laboratorio del Procomun of which he is also part. This latter laboratory, like the ones that go by the same name in Madrid and Mexico City, investigates and acts around forms of commons across material and immaterial spheres.

And finally, the Piquetero movement – notably the MTD Solano – provides me a point of reference regarding the invention of popular resistance and support countering neoliberal economic crisis, as well as ways of understanding the relationship between power, resistance and subjectivity that resonate much with my own approach. This is a movement that rose in the mid 1990s in Argentina, as the economic downturn that was to culminate in the later crisis began to make itself felt via mass layoffs. This nationwide movement operates on a neighbourhood level (‘territorialidad’ is a key concept) to struggle for social services and welfare or to organize their own services, and protest against neoliberal economic policy via road blockages (‘piquetes’ - pickets), demonstrations and land occupations. My contact has been with the people of the MTD Solano, who are a singular example within this movement given their

[...] particular way of confronting everyday dynamics, characterized by horizontality in its organizational structure and the self-management of its working groups, the development of their work in a territorial environment and the production of new values and forms of sociability (solidarity, *compañerismo*, collective discussion), which propose an alternative to the social ruin generated

by capitalism.¹²

As I embarked on my journey to Argentina I thus circulated in the ambits of the above network of collectives, and undertook future archive interviews with a combination of several groups and individuals. This late field research constitutes a kind of line of flight beyond the European context as well as opening my eyes to a world of practices and situations that in fact had become increasingly imaginable in Europe too. Excerpts from interviews done there appear towards the last chapters of this PhD, where I unfold the approaches I learned in Argentina to some extent, tracing points of connection to the European movements as well as pointing to where it may be possible to go from my research (in terms of practices, strategies, references).

One strategy I was aware of before going on my trip was that of ‘militant research’, a mode of co-research proposed by Colectivo Situaciones, which I have adapted and drawn on throughout my PhD process. As they say in a text of 2009:

It is [...] about broadening research out towards lived experiences, which [...] exist in the confrontation with the epochal problems, so that within this permanent confrontation we can go fishing – as with a rod – for signs. Signs that live as much in what’s irrepresentable in the ‘exterior’ situation as in what’s most disquieting about ‘interior’ subjectivities, and on the basis of which we open ourselves to the comprehension of that which insists as pressing necessity in each situation.¹³

With the Micropolitics Research Group in London, we had hosted Situaciones as well as a host of European people pertaining to the networks above, in London in 2009, to talk about this method. As a loosely defined method it has been taken up and adapted by all kinds of groups and people, and given rise to a culture of saying ‘we’ when doing research as well as considering research a task of minor sensitivities and modes of listening, wherein thinking always carries an element of invention and proposal.

A particular approach to relating life and politics emerges from this Argentinian

¹² MTD Almirante Brown (2002) *Los Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados y la construcción del poder popular*. In: Revista Herramienta Nr.21, 2002/03. My translation from Spanish.

¹³ Colectivo Situaciones (2009) *Inquietudes en el Impasse*, Buenos Aires: Tinta Limon. p.28. My translation from Spanish.

context, one that considers creativity and care as paramount to praxis. This is a context that doesn't stem from traditional workerist contexts but from broad popular resistance (against dictatorships or as in 2001, massively undertaken by the unemployed), and as such doesn't suffer some of the blockages of work-based organization as embodied by European leftist parties and groups (cultures of hierarchy/merit and fixation on the spoken/written word, overemphasis on waged labour and industry and blindness to everyday life, reproduction, care, commoning and pedagogy). Despite a certain discrepancy between such Latin American contexts and European ones, I generally choose to speak of militancy also in the latter case, insinuating or inferring other ways of relating life, work and politics¹⁴. The term 'activism' in my view remains wed to voluntarist and meritocratic cultures of organizing, which is precisely what I seek to move away from in this thesis.

As might appear clear, the fieldwork that results from my movements and engagements within and across the above contexts is irreducible to enclosed case studies but rather woven into my argument as voices that speak to each other as much as to me as a researcher. One may understand this 'field' as one of trans-subjectivity in the sense that knowledge, information and affect travels in multiple ways, whether it is through formal or informal collaboration, communications and relations. Texts and media productions, mailing lists, projects, statements and manifestos, spaces, friendships and love relationships are all media through which this networks constitutes itself as a territory, field and world with its own references and ways of doing things.

Experience, genealogy and continuity

In his essay on *Infancy and History*, Agamben draws a genealogy of the concept of 'experience' in western philosophy, going through various combinations of *noūs* (mind) and *psychē* (soul) across the history of philosophy and science. He narrates how science undoes the ways in which experience and knowledge are linked through the imagination, images, fantasy and dreamwork in cultures of antiquity, shamanism and up to medieval times. The antique subject of experience and knowledge finds its fulfilment in the mediations of the imagination, fantasy and dreamwork (similarly to some

¹⁴ The workshop methodologies I have used and developed in relation to this research – a thread running somewhat in parallel to the work of the nanopolitics group – also mostly draw on methods developed in the Latin American laboratory. The theatre, bodywork and pedagogical practices of Augusto Boal and Paolo Freire are keys to this practice.

shamanistic cultures); in the medieval subject-object of experience and knowledge, body/mind and desire/desired are one thanks to the mediation of fantasies and images (love finds its fulfilment in their adoration); until a discrediting of the imagination occurs with Descartes and his *ego cogito*, which radically separates experience and knowledge. Henceforth experience is either something one *has* [as relating to authority and knowledge] or something one *undergoes* [as radical empirical moments that leave little to hold on to], but never the two at the same time. This is complemented by modern psychology and its ‘overriding of the Kantian opposition between the transcendental and the empirical I, and [...] the substantialization of the subject in a “psyche” [...] a psychosomatic I which is the incarnation of the mystical union between *noūs* and *psychē* [...]’.¹⁵

The new-found unity of experience and knowledge in the psycho-somatic subject is not always a fortunate one, leaving us grappling with mysterious symptoms and tensions, forever subjecting ourselves to new diagnosis and the various dispositifs that the therapeutic society implies, and never quite being sure how to understand what goes on between our bodies, minds, souls, others and the world. There is still a fundamental disjunction between what we experience and what we know: ‘the feeling of what happens’ is an ambiguous, uncertain one marked by existential and epistemological anxiety, often marked by discomforts and sufferings that are difficult to share with others. While I do not dwell much on this psycho-somatic dimension here, it however underlies much of the thinking that goes on in this thesis: it invisibly passes through intimate conversations, or at best collective spaces like those of the nanopolitics group, however its collective articulation appears to have its limits. The momentary relief felt when groups take to mapping the discomforts and tensions felt across them has a great liberating impact of opening up a field of unspoken problems (I have experienced this situation in various of the groups mentioned above) – yet beyond the dwelling on specific individual problems and the recognition of a shared condition, I have yet to encounter a context of collective practice that truly opens these dynamics up and takes them to another level. The nanopolitics group has come very close to it, however perhaps we were working against the *aporia* of our time, destined to run up against the social, political and historical bounds defining it (and beginning to map it as a group).

The loss of the imagination as legitimate mediator between knowledge and experience,

¹⁵ Agamben, Giorgio (1993) *Infancy and History, on the destruction of experience*. London: Verso. p.39

and the contradiction that the Cartesian split introduces in the modern subject, lead to a point of extreme ‘poverty’ of experience (in the Benjaminian sense) in Agamben’s account: one where experience is no longer accessible to us. We do not want to ‘have’ the authority of experience, yet neither do we desire to merely ‘pass through’ experience without learning from it and building on it. In speaking of creativity and care, I address two levels of the relation between experience and knowledge, and practices that undo their alienation. On the one hand, the creative practices of the 90s and early 2000s on the one hand (Reclaim the Streets, the movement of movements, the EuroMayDays) which created new common cultural forms and shared practices and memories via networks. On the other hand, the tendency to address care brings a sensitivity to experience and its continuities with the global dimension – chains and networks of care, mobile labour practices and feminised-fragmented everydays.

Definitions of experience may be variously based in notions of perception, (self-) reflection, knowledge and skill. In this enquiry, I am concerned with a notion of collective experience as what gives ground to practices and knowledges – as an instance of lived relationality that is both sensed and understood, something that is ‘grasped’ in both sensory-perceptive, emotive and self-reflexive terms. In Simondon, emotion characterizes not just an internal change, but rather, as one glossary of his key concepts puts it, “‘the sense of action’ [...]. Emotion allows the subject to be oriented in perceptive worlds; or, it allows these worlds to have a sense because of the fact that emotion is the orientation of the subject to the world.’¹⁶ I refer to experience as a feeling and grasping that orients the actions of subjects in the world, bringing with it some weight of emotion. Experience as the grasping of relationalities that have been thus far uncomprehended, allowing for a sense of position within a field of relations.

In the context at stake here, one of individualism, competition, and neoliberal social dispersion as well as the manufacturing of ‘community’, the task of social movements and practices of resistance relates strongly to the reconnection of knowledge and experience. The emptied and formulaic knowledges transmitted in the neoliberal university on the one hand, and the circulation and overflow of banal statements and specific information in media and social networks on the other, makes for a time in which knowledge production and consumption as such is strongly disconnected from

¹⁶ Adkins, T. (2007) *A short list of Gilbert Simondon’s vocabulary*. Entry on Emotivity. Fractal Ontology Blog.

experience, often functioning as the circulation of ‘dead’ knowledge in the sense that it produces no potential, no new pathways for action and relation.¹⁷

We may transpose this analogy to the domain of experience, collective and individual, where in a context of high mediatisation of events (from outside [mainstream media for instance] as well as within [twitter, Facebook, etc.]) and so-called ‘experience economies’, the fact of ‘grasping’ what happens and following the ways in which it produces shared knowledge and understanding is often not too obvious. Silvia Gil speaks of the need for genealogies within social movements:

The forms of ‘scientific’ knowing or the classical way of thinking movements corset, in some sense asphyxiate, the possibility of reconstructing proper knowledges of the situations in which we find ourselves immersed; knowledges that are in turn triggers of practices of resistance and creativity. On the one hand, scientific institutions have swallowed up truth regimes through the dissociation between the subject of knowledge and the object of study, presenting knowing as a classical exercise in neutrality.¹⁸

The separation of knowledge and experience, or knower and known, expresses itself in a culture of social dispersion where it is hard to make meaningful connections between different levels of experience and knowledge. Franco Ingrassia defines dispersion as

[...] the name of a tendency that’s ever more present in our lives. The one that causes our social ties to be ever more instable, weak and heterogeneous. It could be described as the kind of social experience that the hegemony of the market produces. If until recently the stability of ties was the basis upon which we imagined our strategies for intervention (conservative or innovative, reformist or revolutionary), today the growing feeling is that all shared experience unfolds upon a background of contingency, fragility and uncertainty. This new base of the social is what is rendered intelligible through the hypothesis of dispersion.¹⁹

¹⁷ I take this transposition of the dead/living labour analogy onto the domain of knowledge and information production from Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who in turn take it from Matteo Pasquinelli, who takes it from Marx. See Negri, A. and Hardt, M. (2012) Declaration. Online document. p.20

¹⁸ Gil, S. (2012) Nuevos Feminismos. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños. p.40. My translation from Spanish.

¹⁹ Fernandez-Savater, A. (2011), *Pensar (en) la dispersion: entrevista con Franco Ingrassia*. In: Revista Espai en Blanc, Nr.9-10. p.147. My translation from Spanish.

The contexts of mobility and migration in a globalised world contribute to the sense of disconnect, and the concomitant disorientation or loss of sense of position and perspective. As Gil also emphasizes in her genealogy of feminist movements, it is through the production of images, symbolisms and generally new imaginaries that social movements of the past decades have managed to activate new productions of subjectivity and praxis: making new mediations between experience and knowledge possible. At the base level of course, genealogies depart from narrations and memories being put in common. The task I take up here, beyond these very important creative elaborations of common imaginaries and languages, is to look at the dimension of dispersion in relation to everyday experiences and relations of care and affection, and to encourage an elaboration and circulation of knowledges on this level. I end up dwelling much on the concept of ‘continuous experience’ in this context, as picked up from Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vasilis Tsianos²⁰ in their study of transmigration, in an attempt at drawing new lines of connection and relation between the ever multiplying and fragmenting dimensions of life and work of precarious and migrant subjects. The groups listed above are sites where practices sensitive to dispersion, migration and precarity emerge, as relating to the micropolitics of collectives as well as networks.

Having laid out the context and stakes of my research here, as concerning the problems of work, organisation and governance in an era of global neoliberal networks and a particular European manifestation of capitalist crisis, I will now proceed to present some of the methodological dispositifs that have proven most important and useful for tackling this context.

²⁰ Papadopoulos, D., Stephenson, N., Tsianos, V. (2008). Escape routes : control and subversion in the twenty-first century. London, Pluto Press.

0.3 Methodological considerations

How to engage the complex context laid out above, from the viewpoint of social movements and in relation the frameworks of care and creativity, as part of a research practice? There have been three main problematics marking my methodological approach: firstly, that of continuity, which I have tried to activate in working around time, temporality, memory, genealogy and attention, using a specific interview device that plays with time and imagination and in dwelling on the thematic of care. Secondly, as concerns the structuration of my field of research both in micro- and macropolitical terms, the network has emerged as not just an important object of research but indeed also as subject, as structure of collective re/production and as ‘collective subject’ of sorts. Methodologically speaking, this has meant adopting the format of the drift as way of circulating across my ‘field’ of research, as way of making connections and finally also as style of writing which is likely evident from the somewhat modular and network-like organization of contents here. A third important concern, relating to that of networks particularly, is what may be called transversality or intersectionality (neither concept is terribly elegant, and my approach moves between the two): the need to connect up different realities and experiences and to find ways of speaking across them. In what follows I present each of those three aspects.

My methodological framework draws strongly on my background of creative and experimental work, in the arts and beyond – as such the method of the future archive project (see below), as well as diagrams and practices of mapping have guided me throughout my process, traces of which remain visible here. By virtue of a certain topological and future-oriented thinking, which goes back to the creative and militant projects I engage in, the arrangement of much of the material in this thesis is somewhat modular and network-like: a complex field of relations.

Topology is the study of relations, of their shifts and arrangements: the relation between creativity and care is one main tension running through this thesis, which describes a shift from the former to the latter by way of passing from bubble to crisis. Cutting across this shift are lots of complex constellations and struggles, strategies and tactics

drawing upon care and creativity in different ways, using them to provoke change and thus making political use of them. I myself experience my life and work as being constantly intersected and troubled by differential and unfamiliar relations to the matters or work, networks, collectivity and subjectivity at stake here. I have tried not to reduce this experience to one common denominator, but to speak across the spectrum of post-Fordism, feminism and migration in a perhaps slightly mad multitasking that tries to hold these dimensions together, to trace and invent affinities across them. The moment of social, economic and reproductive crisis makes new dynamics emerge within this Bermuda triangle of creativity, care and militancy: speaking for myself, the concern with ‘creative work’ that I shared up until roughly 2008¹ has slowly given way to a concern with ‘collective care’, and to corresponding practices and discourses.

Before I lead into detailed accounts of my methodology, I want to mention some of the projects and processes I myself have engaged in in parallel to this research. A perfect specimen of the blurring of work, politics and life, of academia, art and activism, I am hardly nostalgic for clear-cut separations and abstractions that I know previous generations to have been born into. Like many of my interviewees – who are comrades, friends, collaborators – I appreciate the precarious freedom that emerges from moving collectively across an unstable field, taking it as an occasion for trying to invent new forms of relation and care. Those attempts, in my case, have included a host of workshops around care and collectivity facilitated in social centres, cultural and university spaces in recent years (in the UK and Spain mostly); many future-based interviews and experiments conducted in relation to my research subject; travels and encounters to speak to many people about this; a collective attempt at building a time bank for activist groups in London; the attempt at building a common web platform and London-based group process to share writings on reproduction and care, called ‘reproduce this’; a collective research project around ‘Radical collective care practices’ that I initiated via a women’s arts association in Vienna; a monthly radio show called ‘Sounds of Movement’, about crisis, movements and commoning practices at a free radio in Vienna; and amongst other things, also the editing of the ‘nanopolitics handbook’² which recounts the process and tools of this London-based group. All those parallel strands of activity and knowledge production feed into this thesis in ways

¹ Amongst a wave of critiques of creativity – for an archive of some of those see the website of Mute Magazine, where a search for ‘creativity’ provides a host of such critiques. See also Raunig, G., Wuggenig, U., Ray, G. (Eds.) (2011) Critique of Creativity. London: Mayfly Books.

² Nanopolitics Handbook.

visible and invisible.

Time and temporality, remembering and imagining

The future archive interview method

I have used the interview method of the ‘future archive’³ in my fieldwork. At its most basic level, this method consists in setting up interview-conversations wherein two or more people imagine they are in a desirable future, and remember the present (as past) from there.⁴ This method allowed me to address several of the interlacing problems within my project. Firstly, in addressing subjectivity and imagination, it teases out the way in which people map out lines of continuity and development from their present practices to future ones (as well as ruptures of course, though I focus more on the continuities and affirmative imaginaries – *desirable* futures – to make it more than an exercise in dystopianism or critique). In doing so, it makes understandings of belonging and longer-term commitment tangible, in placing the subject in an assumed continuity of time. This not only helps understand how and in what terms someone imagines change, but also according to what temporal rhythms and flows. Ways of relating to the present and its possibles and configurations, to past experiences and processes, and to the desires and imaginaries associated with the future become tools for articulating as well as inventing ideas around practice.

This method has been appreciated by my co-researchers and -actors within this social-political playing field (if you check the website, you see a history of collaborations and interventions in the ‘field’) and as such has offered a useful dispositif for thinking-talking to people, producing knowledge in common. I have recorded and edited most of these conversations, and presented them back to my partners in dialogue: individually as well as in a collective screening and dinner in London (with the local ‘participants’ and

³ This is an artistic-pedagogical research project that I have been pursuing since 2005, which consists in facilitating conversations and gathering some recordings of such conversations in an online archive. The method I am drawing upon here is the one I have elaborated as part of this project.

⁴ Actually this method is based in remembering the present, rather than in projecting the future straightforwardly. As such it operates on memory and desire, and from there invents desirable future visions. As much as probabilistic scenario planning too is rooted in the present rather than the future, my method differs in that it departs from desire and collective negotiation and imagination rather than from probabilities or normative visions. In any case, as I have said elsewhere, the future does not really exist, and as such to speak of it is always to speak of the present and past – much demagogic discourse and speculative practice on futures denies this fact. To build a solid politics of relating to ‘the future’ – of using this notion to build change rather than perpetuate present tendencies – whether as financial-capitalist or revolutionary, I argue it is important to insist on its rootedness in the present. Whatever is ‘to come’ will start from what becomes possible in the present. See: Zechner, M. (2007). *I will have spoofed the future*. Etcetera Magazine, Vol 25, Issue 109, Brussels.

other interested friends present). I have been lucky to inhabit a process of feedback and co-development that left me feeling like a lonely and alienated academic only at very few moments. Embedding this work within the existing and on-going future archive project⁵ has thus helped me inscribe this research within a continuity of practice, collective and personal. It has also been a tool for making the knowledge produced accessible and intelligible within its field of inception, as a situated and self-reflexive process.

Neoliberal captures of time

In its engagement with long term perspectives, the future archive method has thus allowed interviews to particularly address care, reproduction and sustainability; in its playfulness and performativity, it speaks to the kind of creativity I am interested in, allowing for quantic jumps⁶ in the imagination of possibilities, perspectives and also articulations. Not abstract or measured speculation but encouraging narrations that start from the self (always individual as well as collective, in these interviews) in remembering and imagining. This is a challenge to thought in a time where predominant ways of relating to the future are based either on normative notions of development, determinist affirmations of technological promise or progress, or on the opportunism of speculation and trade, which constantly evaluates future ‘bonds’ not only in the technical-financial sense but also as the capital that human interactions and relations may bring. The current financial crises attest to the impossibility of imposing the logic of debt on all spheres of life:

Finance is a dreadful instrument for controlling the time of action, of neutralisation of the possible, of the ‘living present’, of the ‘plastic zone of transmission of the uncertain’, of the ‘point where past and future [avenir] meet’. It encloses what’s possible within an established framework while projecting it into the future. The future [avenir] is nothing but a simple anticipation of the present domination and exploitation.⁷

⁵ With the consent of interviewees, I have created a site to host those materials within the ‘future archive’ web platform – see the ‘longer term projects’ page on the future archive website.

⁶ In physics, a quantum leap is a non-decomposable movement across a threshold. I use this term in the Simondonian sense, where it points to the fact that individuation does not always occur in continuous ways.

⁷ Lazzarato, M. (2011). *La fabrique de l’homme endetté essai sur la condition néolibérale*. Paris, Éd. Amsterdam. p.57. My translation from French.

A key contemporary problem seems to be the sense of what is possible. Time and the possibilities of the present and future – as possibilities of action and of thought – play a key role not only in the social movements in question, but are at a critical phase more generally today, as crisis, debt, austerity and infinite speculation void the present of its potentiality. In the text quoted above, Maurizio Lazzarato echoes Benjamin's description of the barbarian subjectivity in this context of neoliberalism, as one that sees options and possible paths everywhere, always being at crossroads and unsure about what will come next. The existential uncertainties and loneliness of everyday decision-making are echoed by many of my interviewees, as in this fragment of Marga's discourse on networks and time:

One effect of the network is fragmented time. Fragmented time means that my time continuum of the 24 hours of the day is fragmented into moments that are incompatible with one another. They don't form a unity. That's very different from the time of the housewife who is a housewife from when she gets up in the morning until when she goes to sleep, and who is always doing – not the same activity, but who is always in the horizon of time, that of caring for the family. In the network that doesn't happen because you go jumping from fragment to fragment.⁸

While we may question this assertion about a housewife's time being unitary, based for instance on the time budget studies on domestic work, which show that housework is a matter of intense multi-taking, wherein perhaps the fact of thinking about several people at once may be seen as equally fragmented as the multi-tasking of the precarious immaterial worker whose care tasks only concern him- or herself. But we will return to these similarities and differences between care and immaterial worker at many stages in this PhD, for now let's hear Marga's reflection on futurity:

And so with fragmented time, you can't project a future, because you're going towards a fragmented future. A fragmented future is not a good future because what you expect from the future is security – because if not, it is like the present. That's to say: while a person is young, they have power, health and energy, they can lead a sexual life that gives them pleasure and all those things – well, you don't need a future. With a fragmented present, if you are physically and

⁸ Interview with Marga, Madrid, November 2011. My translation from Spanish.

psychically well equipped, you can stand it, and you can live well, but you can't project a future. You can't see yourself where you'll be in 30 years, because these fragments don't take you anywhere, they'd bring you to hundreds of places. But that's not sustainable, that won't be able to exist – if it is the case, it'll be because you've died young.⁹

Indeed there is a difference in which self-reliance and an involvement in dense relations of care structure one's relation to the future, in the sense that the former future hinges more on money while the latter draws more on others. Whether we see the condition of dependency and vulnerability of the classical stay at home mother as a situation of precarity or not is one matter (chapters A.3 to B.3 provide some possible answers). Yet to be sure it is true that as opposed to the worker who has to permanently go find new jobs, a housewife's continuity of practice is guaranteed (if she plays along with the needs of her husband and children, and if no such thing as unemployment happens to the breadwinner, that is).

In the scenario of multiple jobs and networked entrepreneurialism, of so-called feminized work, which we are predominantly concerned with here, not just the present but also the future are permanently in question: precarity fragments time and splits the future into thousands of impossible possibles. At the same time, debt/credit capture our capacity to act on our own terms altogether, submitting the future to their (moralistic-instrumental) terms:

The importance of the debt economy is to do with the fact that it appropriates and exploits not only the chronological time of employment, but also *action*, non-chronological time, time as choice, decision, wager on what will happen and on the forces (trust, desire, courage) that make choice, decision and acting possible.¹⁰

In this thesis, I predominantly focus on these dimensions of subjectivity and action in the context of collective organisations of precarious workers in their 30s, some of them without any substantial caring role in the sense of having family dependents. The question of care here emerges in relation to the social, affective and collaborative

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Lazzarato, M. (2012), *La fabrique de l'homme endetté*. p.45.

networks that characterize the life forms of large parts of this generation of precarity, and in relation to inventing other models of sustaining collectivity. When neoliberal capitalism captures not only work time but also life time, and when austerity policies dismantle broad support structures, social reproduction and care become sites of struggle in new and intertwined ways. The family, the network and the institution are equally important therein, as spaces across which lives are molded and sustained. While the liberal ideal of independence ultimately refers to those who can buy themselves out of social and affective interdependence, it is clear that only few people can afford to outsource their reliance on others towards paid services, particularly in times of precarity and crisis.

In referring all aspects of existence back to an entrepreneurial subjectivity, the current neoliberal phase of accumulation has taken hold not just of our capacities to work but also of our capacities to decide, imagine and act together. To see our relations to others as more than sporadic and voluntaristic enterprises, outsourceable if need be, requires a subjective shift, which is being set in motion by social movements and dynamics of precarization. How do different care networks and collectivities conceive of this capture of their capacity to act together, and how do they resist it? It is a challenge to collectively engage with the possibilities of the present: whilst crisis and austerity do make new collective organisations, solidarities and resistances emerge, their consistency and sustainability hinge on a politics of resisting finance, debt and accumulation as much as a new micropolitics of care, trust and associational bonds.

Collective temporalities

Nelly speaks of the pleasure and affectivity of sharing collective moments, using the model of the family as well as of the village to describe the modes of belonging and trust generated in her friendship context (one of joyful creative politics and pedagogy):

I think it was... because we all decided to shape our time as passionately as we wanted, as we felt it – so most of our activities and interactions they were led by our desires to spend time with each other, to make sense of each other's skills, potentials, thoughts... in quite clear political response to a completely oversystematized empty tick-boxing world around us. Yeah, and we really liked what people were... we really liked people I think, we really liked people, all of us. I think that's why it felt so... I mean you how a village gets together because it is so... [gestures rubbing fingers against each other] – it is density, and I think

that it is this strong joy for people made this density.¹¹

Creating spaces and times for meaningful encounters and action is not self-evident in a global neoliberal city like London, where Nelly speaks from. People come and go, a sense of being connected to all the world prevails, urgencies and fronts of struggle multiply, individual needs and life choices make for a field of permanent disaggregation and recomposition. Oftentimes projects – not least those with some funding attached, helping with paying the rent – constitute important moments of gathering and collective reflection.¹²

In a city like London, for precarious service workers like those at stake in my enquiry, ‘project’ is often the only code word for finding some consistent way of engaging with a group of people (particularly those working in the cultural sector).¹³ The ‘project’ and ‘event’ formats should not be overestimated – not just because indeed everyday conversations and encounters are also important spaces for the elaboration, circulation and sedimentation of collective knowledge¹⁴ – but also because they come with strings attached and often reproduce cultures of frantic overproduction and multiplication. Nelly’s account hints at this with some delightful clarity:

We were just overwhelmed I think – I mean it was partly us being overwhelmed, or so much so in the beginning so it was like – wasn’t it – us trying to figure out new forms of ‘organizing’ [quotation mark gesture] ourselves versus ways of organizing that we had learned so we still spent a lot of time in setting up things, which we needed in order that we could create a structure in which we could find different ways of relating with each other. But yeah, we lost a lot of... I think we’d call that ‘time’ but I’d call it ‘energy’, on trying to arrange things. But there were attempts, I remember, there were attempts to just set up spaces where people could come and do things together. [...]

¹¹ Interview with Nelly.

¹² See Appendix 2 for a timeline of some collective encounters and events that make for sure aggregation points in the network my research departs from (which is not identical to that of Nelly or any other of my interviewees, of course). This timeline is obviously not exhaustive, but comes from the situated viewpoint of my research. Its elements do in no way compose a smooth progression or self-identical whole, but of messy and multitudinous processes of assembly, association and organising which have their shortcomings, leaps and relapses

¹³ ‘Political collective’ is another, overlapping way to somewhat consistent sociality, providing spaces of strong bonding and shared experience. Some also dare into ‘family’, yet most people at stake here approach this term with great caution – see chapter B.2.

¹⁴ I have not attempted to map the kitchen or sofa in this sense – my own or other’s – though to be sure the maps arising from there would be very interesting and rich!

As Nelly points out, it is not just time that is at stake in current struggles – as labour time – but also and chiefly also energy – life time. Across paid and unpaid work, as well as across productive and convivial networks, time-energy is an increasing problem.

Urgency and speed

The network is one key dispositif configuring collective work, time and energy in new ways: its fluid, fragmented and accelerated temporalities make it difficult to grasp urgencies and relations sometimes. As Francisco Ferrara says in his study of the singularity of some unemployed people's movements in the Buenos Aires province:

The contemporary quotidian is no more than a succession of partial and momentary connections and disconnections, through which the life of subjects passes. [...] In the conditions of fluidity that mark contemporary society, a series of operations constitute the modalities which induce the adequate subjectivity. One of them is the going through, the senseless sliding through experiences that privilege sensory stimulation instead of a reflexive position. [...] Stopping the vertigo in order to be able to inhabit a situation, moving from simply being to constitute oneself in an active sense, being inhabitant rather than occupant.¹⁵

Speaking about collectivity and collaboration in an interview, Anja points to 'fomo' – fear of missing out – a widely spread condition that invests individuals and groups and leads them to be endlessly distracted, unable to differentiate between what shorter and longer term plans, desires and needs. As she says, a useful question to ask then can be 'so why do we actually do something? Like, how does it pertain to our everyday lives, how urgent is it for us actually?'¹⁶

As Francesco Ferrara says of the self-organisation of the Piqueteros of Solano, of the MTD context I later did my interviews in: 'A particular learning process helps them mark the difference between the times of others and their own times.'¹⁷ One of the tasks at hand in relation to the speed and urgency of the neoliberal network relates to what we might call dead and living time: learning to differentiate between what pertains to oneself as individual and collectivity and what is more of the order of a random

¹⁵ Ferrara, *Más allá del corte de rutas*. pp.97-100.

¹⁶ Interview with Anja, Graz, August 2011.

¹⁷ Ferrara, *Más allá del corte de rutas*. pp.108-109.

appearance, what increases ones potency as a living and social being (individual or collective) and what doesn't.

Ferrara describes an affinity between the Argentinian Piqueteros' approach and how Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas responds to the urgent enquiries of media at a press conference in saying 'We ask you to respect the rhythm of dialogue. The compañeros don't understand this rush you and others can have [...]'.¹⁸ This politics of taking things with calm, of 'going slow in order to go far', to give the time for every compañera and compañero to follow and join, as found in the Zapatistas and also the Piqueteros, is a mode of temporality that 'isn't that required by the governments, the stock markets, the banks or the politicians, it is time that runs against the velocity that capital needs in order to flow.'¹⁹ In a context where the self as entrepreneur is the carrier of such pressures of capital flows (financial, cultural or otherwise), the strategy of taking time for relations might not always be easy to apply, yet it seems crucial, in order to enable that temporality which also corresponds to care, to make longer term processes possible, to working and prepare a territory carefully.

In the given context, this is complicated not only by competition and precarity but also by mobility, making for the fact of never knowing how long one will stay, how much to invest in a given place and time. Beyond affirmations of commitment and dwelling patiently – no doubt important too, yet perhaps not so realistic in many cases – what I will be proposing in my arguments around networks and migration is new ways of imagining and constructing territories across borders and networks, of trust and commitment that can articulate local realities with the global level. The continuity of experience, relation and practice within networks is one of the key concerns of my methodological framework. In relation to time and continuity, this thus plays out on three main levels:

1. Genealogy: addressing the past, building memory, building continuity, situating along a trajectory of what came before, giving background (this level is predominantly addressed through genealogical footnotes and passages in the text here)
2. Care and respect: addressing the present, ways of inhabiting it, connecting across fragmented instances of time and place, taking and giving account of networked

¹⁸ Ibid. p.102

¹⁹ Ibid. p.104

everydays (this is thematically at stake, as well as in the embedded aspect of my research)

3. Imagination and projection: seeing possible trajectories, activating desire and creativity to produce new knowledge and practice

I have dedicated a considerable part of this thesis to investigating different modalities of collectivity and networked relations, interweaving these levels and concerns.

Network(ed) research as (re)production of subjectivity and relations

Situatedness and networks

In discourses drawing on the works of Deleuze and Guattari, there is often reference to a ‘production’ of subjectivity. While it appears useful to point to the constructedness of subjectivity – always occurring in a dialogue between self and world – the insistence on the term ‘production’ may be seen as limiting questions of subjectivity to spheres of work and autonomy that are relatively androcentric. Hence for a moment I want to pause here and posit the meaning of reproduction in relation to subjectivity. In the given social-militant context, what is at stake is not just the production of subjectivity but also ways of sustaining, nourishing, caring for it: or does subjectivity fundamentally hinge on the new? While it is controversial to use the term ‘reproduction’ to describe the reflexive care for oneself and others (see also section C), since the term merely points to the ‘other’ of what is recognized as work and economically valuable, I place the ‘re’ here as a provocation here, to propose networked research not just along the lines of discovery and the new but also in the trajectory of affirming cultural forms and working upon real relations. If like housewives, commoning networkers are captured by capital as the ‘other’ of dominant and visible modes of value generation, it is clear that merely rejecting this ‘reproductive’ sphere as impure or corrupted leads to no promising transversal politics. Hence the proposal here is to see networks as spaces and subjects of care and to use research as a means to consolidate this. If the ‘care for’ the network refers to its self-organisation while its ‘reproduction’ tendentially refers more to its hegemonic replication, I still insist that we need to address both levels of networks in relation to subjectivity.

Many of the key concepts and questions at play here have been proposed, elaborated

and tested in a collective manner across relational webs and beyond. As much as being a product of the academy, this thesis is ‘of’ this network, in the sense not just of emerging from it but also as pertaining and belonging to it, prolonging it. At stake is not just collective writing (with me as the ‘chief editor’ in this case) but also an ethics of situated knowledge and the urgent need for another understanding of objectivity – and corresponding research methods. Donna Haraway reflects on this from a feminist perspective in a 1988 essay, still pertinent:

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. [...] There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds. All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view, even when the other is our own machine. That’s not alienating distance; that a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity.²⁰

An important aspect of the methodology I am employing here is that the research I bring together is one of the many dispositifs through which my ‘field’ reflects on itself (not as a discipline but as an existential and political space, a territory perhaps).

Writing the network, being written by the network: performativities

To point to the performative aspect of doing militant research within a network context, I would like to refer briefly to the way Annelise Riles, in her book on transnational issue networks, proposes to see ‘the Network as a broader class of phenomena. By the “Network”, I mean to refer to a set of institutions, knowledge practices, and artefacts thereof that internally generate the effects of their own reality by reflecting on themselves.’²¹ This self- and mutual reflexivity is important for my definition of a network here, beyond the bounds of a discipline or territory. Equally important to my enquiry into a network are specific cultures of attention that open onto care. Given

²⁰ Haraway, D. (1988). *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. *Feminist Studies* 14(3). p.583

²¹ Riles, A. (2000). *The network inside out*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press. p. 3.

attention and consideration, ‘net-work’ can become a reflective form that allows a thinking of composition as on-going process, as well as a re-thinking of what we call ‘work’.

Annelise Riles critically analyses the dominance of network analysis within a broader ‘reflexive turn’ whereby often ‘anthropological analysis is reduced to restatement, to repetition, to generating reflexive modernity’s “doubles.”’²² To call something a network is as good as calling it by another name, sometimes, since many associational forms can be described as networks. Often network analysis merely re-confirms what exists – in a language and grammar that isn’t native to the context spoken about. I may be accused of some such importing of network terminology into domains not traditionally associated with it, in speaking of migrant and family networks in section B for example: my naming there constitutes an interventionist attempt of sorts, intending to open onto new considerations of association and organisation rather than reiterating given ‘rough consensus’ on networks. The intention with such provocative or suggestive naming is one of opening new perspectives and generating new spaces for subject formation and action, rather than of proposing truths.

As with naming something ‘work’, performativity is not to be underestimated when calling something a ‘network’ – indeed ‘the naming of a network is the existence of a network’.²³ Network analysis is performative, mapping out a topology of relations that might correspond to experience yet have no formal existence. What I am interested in here is not the affirmation of networks as real objects or subjects but the possibility in their becoming subject-objects of care. This implies the invention of ‘technologies of the self’ in the Foucauldian sense, of devices and cultures that make self-reflection, self-organisation, and self-care possible, grasping networks as spaces of collective subjectivation. Thus to think of things in terms of networks might also mean to open oneself up to a process of caring: ‘Whenever a network is deployed, a substance is transformed from an object into a thing, or we might say, from a matter of fact to a matter of concerns’²⁴ says Bruno Latour. When something comes to be of concern, it comes to be an object of care and attention.

²² Ibid. p. 14

²³ Ibid. p. 172

²⁴ Latour, B. (2005) Reflections of an actor network theorist. In: Reassembling the Social. Oxford University Press. p.4

The network as subject?

Can the network perspective be seen not just as an organisational metaphor, but as a perspective that lends itself to creative and caring processes of thinking individuation or ontogenesis (wherein ‘actors’ are neither described as self-contained nor inscribed as humans only)? Radical empiricism, with its understanding of trans-subjective intelligence, or Simondonian, Deleuzian and Guattarian affirmations of collective becoming, go some way to think this through.²⁵

Brian Massumi, a thinker drawing on all of the mentioned authors, mentions in summarising William James’s radical empiricism: ‘[...] relations must be accounted as being as real as the terms related. In other words, relations have a mode of reality distinct from that of the discrete objects we find in relation.’²⁶ The view that association is not a matter of relations between ideas or abstract relations only but also between objects and bodies, points to a way of grasping the network as more than a mapping dispositif or figure of speech, but as encompassing subjectivity itself (beyond the individuals engaged in it). This way of thinking experience is based on a radical affirmation of sensation and feeling, building on the thought of William James:

Just so, I maintain, does a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective ‘content.’ In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing. And, since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective, both at once.²⁷

In some instances here, I am inferring that the network is such a ‘knower’, as a trans-subjective experience that may or may not come to be formalised, as distinct mode of relationality that takes on singular dimensions. Where sociological theories of groups mostly involve categorizing and counting human bodies, a focus on subjectivity and networks allows us to grasp informal processes of assemblage and organisation based

²⁵ I am not referring further to ANT since sensitivity to relationality beyond the technical and human is necessary for moving network discourses elsewhere, in my view.

²⁶ Massumi, B. (2008), *The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens*. In: *Inflexions 1.1 How is Research-Creation?*, Online publication, May 2008. www.inflexions.org

²⁷ James, W. (1904) *Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?*. First published in *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 1, 477-491.

on shared experiences, sensations-perceptions and knowledges.

The works of Guattari and Deleuze around subjectivity and affect develop ways of understanding complex relational processes with a sensitivity to the intersections of different planes and dynamics that compose processes and bodies. Deleuze draws inspiration from Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation, an important point of reference in speaking of trans-subjectivity and collective individuation that I am somewhat subterraneously drawing upon here. In Simondon's view, individuation is a matter of intersections of physical, biological, psychic, collective and technical processes of becoming (which are not always subject to linear development).

Though deeply rooted in the study of science, Simondon's work may be said to touch upon an animistic perspective, where anything in the world may be ascribed subjectivity²⁸ and thus become an object of care: networks and groups are singular fields of experience not just objectively but also subjectively. Simondon theorizes collective individuation as much as he thinks through that of individuals: 'the individual' in his terms is not the personal, nor is 'the subject' limited to human beings: the individual is rather that which has some shape or form, while the subject is of a higher order we may say, made of the resonance of individual²⁹ with pre-individual (potential) dimensions. Without going much further in this quick excursion, I want to point out that this way of thinking becoming offers a promising way out of humanism and identity politics, opening to seeing subjects on levels of persons as much as groups and other forms of collectivity. As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro says of animism and subjectivity, in an interview about the work of Guattari: 'Subjectivity is not a transcendental synthesis but rather—to use someone else's words—a disjunctive synthesis. And for me this is animism. [...] This is animism, the idea that the subject is outside. It is everywhere. And that society is not a guard, that the state is neither

²⁸ Drawing on the work of Simondon as well as Guattari (and of Foucault, in some aspects), I refer to subjectivity as the capacity of something to respond to the world and by virtue of that also to other subjects, in autonomous or 'open' ways: to reflexively relate. Reflexivity needn't pass through thought or the will however, but rather refers to a not entirely predeterminable composition of something with something else (in Simondon's terms, of the pre-individual sphere with individuated components). Subjectivity as such is not tied to individuality (in the sense of thought, will and culture), but to the capacity to relate in an open way. As such, a plant or bench may also be ascribed subjectivity. See also Zechner, M. (2010) *Subjetividade e Coletividade: Problemas de Relacao*. In: *Cadernos de Subjetividade*, Sao Paulo: PUC. pp. 132-145

²⁹ Since my discourse here isn't necessarily filtered through that of Simondon (while influenced and inspired by it), 'individual' in my terms still mostly refers to the person or unit, as opposed to the collective.

guarding nor a guard, meaning that the society does not coincide with the state.³⁰ If we think the relation between subjectivity and association beyond the human and the state, new possibilities of envisaging collective processes emerge: not as coincidence or unity but as fields of disjunctive synthesis, which may be grasped through figures of the network to some extent.

Manufacturing collectivity

Just as a network analysis from within may produce new understandings of affinity and common practice, it can also operate as an interpellation from outside, a ‘manufacturing’³¹ of association where in fact there is none, or the production of phantoms and fears via the suggestion of unity (as in the rhetorics of terrorist or criminal networks). When practised from within, the self-reflection of a network can have coalescing effects:

In the endless conferences and panel discussions that animated networkers’ lives, as we saw, one was "doing" something for and on behalf of the Network by talking about the Network and the way others talked about it.³²

On an obvious level, we may say that just as calling an activity ‘work’, calling a relational field a ‘network’ or indeed a ‘family’, has its consequences; it positions activities and actors differently, interpellates them into a sense of finality or project. Such naming is never neutral, and its use is always contested. My interpellative manoeuvres in this thesis address themselves to a variety of contexts, such as post-Fordist work, social movements, NGO and volunteering cultures. They speak to the context of global civil society and international relations – where networks often fail to materialise any ‘common’, rather strengthening existing power fault lines, particularly when they are manufactured as opposed to self-organised.

In the neoliberal world, building a network can give the sense of a quick fix to a problem of non-communication, replacing it with total communication yet not necessarily producing a common. ‘Networking’ often speaks of a way of imagining the social that is voluntaristic, quick and superficial in its attempts at fixing up differences without engaging in long and complex processes of translation and negotiation (not

³⁰ Lazzarato, M. and Melitopoulos, A. (2012) *Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism*. *E-Flux Journal* #36, 07/2012. See this journal issue for related reflections on animism.

³¹ See Hodgson, L. (2004). "Manufactured Civil Society." *Critical Social Policy* 24(2).

³² Riles, *The network inside out*. p.172

unlike some variants of activism). This is the dark side of networking, which pertains particularly to strategic, manufactured and voluntaristic projects and domains – an aspect that resonates particularly throughout chapters B.1 and C.1 here.

The sense in which I will refer to networks here is a more affirmative one – I am interested in the situations where collectivity is capable of translating precarity into a constitutive vulnerability that enables the capacity to care. In this context, ‘reflexive talk’ on the network may fulfil a function similar to that of gossip, which Starhawk describes with great political sensitivity:

Gossip has had a bad reputation as being either malicious or trivial. But in any real community, people become interested in each others’ relationships within the group, love affairs, quarrels, problems. The talking we do about each other provides us with invaluable information: it makes us aware of whom we can trust and whom we distrust, of whom to treat carefully and whom to confront, of what we can realistically expect a group to do together. Gossip maintains the social order in a close-knit society more effectively than the law.³³

My writing here has elements of gossip, perhaps – it is certainly based on a lot of it. I see such theorizing-narrativizing gossip as elementary to building other kinds of care systems, to reimagine collective practices from the point of view of the everyday and reproduction.

Familiarity, desire and imagination

‘Association’ is not just a synonym for assembly or joint organisation here, but also points to the capacity for making new connections and projecting new forms of belonging, bond and linkage. To do this as part of a project of theorizing from within is to some extent also to hallucinate and dream things, to trace potentials and follow their pathways: to engage with the field of the pre-individual, in Simondon’s terms. In such resonance, the difference between self and other or between ‘I’ and ‘we’ is not obvious, rather it produces a dynamic from which new positions and relations emerge. Blurred barriers between my voice and those of others: it is often my choice not to use the mechanisms of social science to produce distance. As Riles says of network research as method:

³³ Starhawk (1990 [1987]). Truth or dare : encounters with power, authority, and mystery, San Francisco ; London : Harper & Row. p.15/16

[...] the focus of the engagement must lie in the problem of how to render the familiar accessible ethnographically, not in the identification of new multisited "places," diasporic "groups," or technological phenomena for anthropological study. This will require finding a point of access from within the ethnographic material-it will require turning the Network Inside Out.³⁴

The familiarity characteristic of the network in question will even bring me so far as to envisage the network as family, later on. Nelly, as well as quite some of the other women (and, to a lesser extent, men) I spoke to in this process, shares intuitions about families: 'I always speak about my friends as family...'.³⁵ Whether it is from the point of view of a generational shift and getting-old, or from the viewpoint of mobility and transnational belonging, the desiring lines between networks are often blurry.

The challenge thus lies in how to create new imaginaries and continuities around invention and care – beyond the Autonomist-creative politics of desire. As Silvia Gil asks: 'Is it possible to think desire not just as a positive element but as something that's built upon the limits that are also a part of our existence?'³⁶ Engaging collective imagination towards talking about care and the everyday, speaking about the interdependencies and vulnerabilities that exist across webs of friendship, collaboration and comradeship make lines of desire emerge that are unlike those 'idealizations or mystifications of life and the potency of desire', allowing for differential imaginaries of life in common to emerge. To speak of those invisible sides of what holds our collectivities together – seen as dark, negative and disempowering by those who haven't looked into them perhaps, or who are left alone with them – is an attempt at breaking the separation between experience and knowledge down. Because that 'sandy ground and gravel' (Oscar) of relations is an important site of experience and a promising ground for knowledge production, as practices such as those emerging from the women's social centre La Eskalera Karakola in Madrid show.

From subjectivity to objectivity and back again

The Argentinian psychoanalyst and institutional analyst Franco Ingrassia 'hallucinates' beautifully on the theme of objectivity, subjectivity and performativity, in projecting

³⁴ Riles, A. (2000). *The network inside out*. p.6

³⁵ Interview with Nelly.

³⁶ Gil, S. (2012) *Nuevos Feminismos*. p.25

himself into a distant desirable future in a 2012 interview:

[...] back then [in 2012] the directionality went from the subjective to the objective, rather than from the objective to the subjective... so before the Internet, before all that, there was the street and the question of occupying it. That's to say, first there was *the objective fact*, that there was a street, and then *the subjective level*: the occupation of the street, the public occupation, for a protest or whatever. That's to say the public sphere on the one hand, and then [on the other hand] one established the modes of occupying it as a subjective occupation. However with virtualization, the Internet and so on, this process was reversed, so that it was *the occupation* that founded the place that was being occupied. Occupying the square meant inventing it, because there was no square: [Plaza del] Sol was not a [public] square until the movement invented it as such. So to occupy it subjectively meant to found it objectively, so that it became a square objectively speaking: a space of encounters, a public space... without this occupation however, it was a space of passage, of consumption.³⁷

My methodology consists in a movement back and forth between objective and subjective perspectives, going back and forth between social science references and narrative imaginaries. While 'care networks' may not be an obvious subjective category (in people's self-understanding, they are likely part of families or couples, but not necessarily of care networks), my research follows their path since they may be seen to exist objectively (else how would we survive). In the opposite sense, while universal public structures don't objectively exist anymore in post-welfare states, they still exist in the imaginary of many. Hence there is a politics of revindicating and reclaiming on the one hand, and one of tracing and paying attention on the other. If the political challenge in a context of neoliberal individualism and welfare decomposition is about occupying one's care network as well as hospital in order to found it, then it is clear that a combination of approaches and methods is needed, translating between objective and subjective in ways that create openings.

As Ingrassia suggests: turning a subjective fact, perception or sensibility into an action that inaugurates and embodies this fact, making it a reality that others can see too. This is what I try to get at in speaking of care networks. At the same time, to be more than a

³⁷ Interview with Laboratorio del Procomun, Rosario, April 2012.

dream, there is a need for concrete practices of the common, of new institutions and pacts to inhabit. We find ourselves having to reinvent the objective world, in this sense, as much as we have to implicate our own subjectivities in our struggles. Speaking of care networks, of militant-creative families or of common institutions implies this work of cutting transversally across objective and subjective dimensions, across disciplinary-discursive fields as well as social fields.

Transversality and intersectionality

There are two methodological approaches at play in my work that found my approach to research, analysis and political positioning as trying to cut across, overlap, fold and unfold categorisations. These concepts are ‘transversality’, as proposed by Felix Guattari in the 1960s as a tool for the analysis of groups and institutions, and ‘intersectionality’, as proposed by radical feminists in the 1980s and 90s. Those two approaches hold as much in common as they bear differences: I will briefly point to some of those in order to throw some light upon my use of Autonomist and feminist research methods.

‘Transversality’ emerges from a context of militant and institutional experimentation and investigation as occurring within the French 1960s and 70s, associated with the schizoanalyst, philosopher and militant Felix Guattari.³⁸ Guattari points to this concept in a text of 1964:

Transversality is a dimension that tries to overcome two impasses, that of pure verticality and that of simple horizontality; it tends to be achieved when there is a maximal communication between different levels and, above all, in different meanings [sens]. It is this that a subject group [groupe sujet] is working towards. For example, the overt communication that takes place within the medical circle consisting of the superintendent and the house-doctors may remain on an extremely formal level, and it may appear that its coefficient of transversality is very low. On the other hand the latent and repressed coefficient existing at the department level may be found to be much higher: the nurses have more genuine relationships among themselves, by virtue of which the patients can make

³⁸ See for instance the chapter on the ‘Centre for Institutional Study, Research and Education’: *Le CERFI dans ses oeuvres*, in: Dosse, F. (2009) *Gilles Deleuze Felix Guattari: Biographie Croisée*, Paris: La Découverte. pp.319-336

transferences that can have a therapeutic effect.³⁹

Horizontality here features in a sense distinct from its use in network cultures. It is to be understood ‘as it exists in the disturbed wards of a hospital, or, even more, in senile wards: in other words a situation in which things and people fit in as best as they can with the situation in which they find themselves.’⁴⁰ Horizontality is here defined as the absence of manifest conflict, of an apparent equality or commensurability of everything with everything else, where differences aren’t expressed or confronted but ignored or simply managed: a situation that can be equally debilitating as vertical hierarchy and pyramidal structures. Guattari unknowingly anticipates a key critique made of network theories and their flattening notions of horizontality, as well as the opportunism (‘fit in as best as they can’) that goes with it. He also points to the network’s function in organising survival where not many alternatives are given. Transversality, then, is about an organisational-analytic model that cuts across both the vertical and the horizontal, that leaves behind fierce hierarchical modes as well as debilitating flat ones.

Intersectionality is a more sociological concept that tries to understand how various aspects of identity and social position intertwine and overlap to make specific experiences of exclusion, identity or discrimination. Intersectionality ‘focuses on diverse and marginalized positions. Gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and nationality are categories that may enhance the complexity of intersectionality, and point towards identities in transition.’⁴¹ Black feminist Kimberle Kernshaw, when working with law in the 1990s, noticed an ‘initial reluctance of courts to credit the claims of women of colour when they were seeking remedies for race and gender discrimination. If the injuries were simultaneously produced [i.e. on the basis of both race and sex], the law, it seemed, was confounded.’⁴² Intersectionality thus sets out to analyse the specific and minoritarian experiences and identities that come with intertwined experiences and conditions across gender, race, class, disability, etc.

Subjectivity and identity

One of the key differences between the transversality and intersectionality approaches

³⁹ Guattari, F.(1984). *Transversality*, in: *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, Trans. Rosemary Sheed. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.17

⁴¹ Knudsen, S. (2006). *Intersectionality—A Theoretical Inspiration in the Analysis of Minority Cultures and Identities in Textbooks*. Caen University Conference Archive.

⁴² Crenshaw, K. (1991) *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6., pp. 1241–1299.

concerns the way they think identity and subjectivity. This is an important political question, particularly when it comes to the way those concepts translate into practice.

Transversality refers to a ‘cutting across’ of relational dynamics that may not go along lines of objective fact or identity, by associating diverse entities such as living beings, objects and materials (as in Guattari’s conceptualisations of the machinic). It departs from an analysis of subjectivity in the terms of Guattari and Deleuze: in this tradition, the way people experience and act is not primarily to be grasped through their official status or roles but also through the singular sensitivities and compositions they have access to and activate. Sensitivities are material because affect is chemical and electric in the body, and compositions are transversal in that they involve ‘actors’ of various kinds, reaching beyond the human. Deleuze and Guattari share this idea with Latour, and it is not by chance that it emerges from a context of thinking networks, rhizomes and overlapping plateaus. Subjectivation processes operate through infinitely fine tunings as well as leaps and pauses (akin to quantum logics and Simondon’s theory of individuation),⁴³ and as such are not entirely predictable or capturable.

In a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, subjectivity is not necessarily related to the individual but is what cuts across a situation and its actors, producing possible ways of relating. As Guattari says in an essay on ‘Subjectivity and History’: ‘[...] Collective subjectivity is not the result of a sum of individual subjectivities. The process of singularization of subjectivity is accomplished by adopting, associating, and agglomerating dimensions of different kinds.’⁴⁴ Subjectivity is essentially social, and

[...] the question is not really one of recovering the level of our individuality, because we can go on spinning around it as if we had a terrible toothache, without being able to release processes of singularization on an intrapersonal, or on an extrapersonal level. Because in order to do so, it is necessary to connect with the outside.⁴⁵

How does this relate to intersectionality then, with its dwelling on specific compositions of social identities as embodied by individuals and imposed via institutions?

⁴³ The notion of subjectivity I operate here draws heavily on the work of Gilbert Simondon. See Simondon, G. and J. Garelli (2005). *L’individuation*. And see also: Zechner, M. (2010) *Subjetividade e Coletividade: Problemas de Relacao*.

⁴⁴ Guattari, F. ([1982] 2009), *Subjectivity and History*, in: Guattari, F., S. Rolnik, et al. *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, Los Angeles: Semiotexte. p. 51

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 53.

Intersectionality maps out overlapping trajectories and identities of subjects positioned at crossroads between social categories and roles. Its analyses help us understand ‘the ways in which models of oppression [...] interrelate to create a system of oppression involving multiple forms of discrimination.’⁴⁶ For example: what is the specific experience and oppression common to black women; or to gay Asian men; or old working class people? The premise here is that aspects of social identity should not be looked at in isolation, but as a complex that produces specific experiences and positions. Intersectionality addresses how discrimination is institutionalised and how people exist at the crossroads of specific stereotypes and statuses, focusing largely on governmental power and its effect on social relations. It makes specific and known what often passes as self-evident: the ways in which markers of identity are associated with each other.

Beyond dwelling on identity however, intersectionality also aims to dismantle solid categorizations: by pluralizing them, pointing to the fact that neither race, class nor gender are universals but rather embodied experiences, ever differently embodied. With intersectionality we may analyse the dominant compositional dynamics and limitations of a collective process, encourage more diversity across a group, as well as draw attention to the ways in which ‘blackness’ does not mean a unitary thing depending on whether you are woman or man, queer or straight. Intersectionality may be thought not just as additive (black+woman+disabled+Puerto Rican...) but as complex in that different dimensions of identity co-constitute and enforce one another sometimes.⁴⁷

Intersectionality proposes a politics of difference that prefers diversity (limited and accountable difference) to singularity (immeasurable, incommensurable difference). The difference between transversality and intersectionality is thus strong in the face of the politics of identity and difference. Even where the latter takes malleability, interactions and fluidity into account, its basic premise remains identity, that is, the identification (and supposed self-identification) of subjects with their status. These identities are the basis of struggle, according to intersectionality: women’s groups, gay groups, disabled groups etc. each operate on their specific terrain and are legitimate because of their claim to identity, to embodying a very dimension of experience. The question of ‘speaking on behalf of others’ is one of the major pitfalls of political research in the times of philanthropism and feel-good social engagement, and the

⁴⁶ WIDE/ Women in Development Europe (2009) Conference Report, p.3

⁴⁷ See Knudsen, S. (2006). *Intersectionality*.

development of the intersectional approach to some extent averts this by encouraging self-representation. To be sure, representation remains problematic in itself nevertheless.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian transversality may be said to dodge the deadlock of representation by concerning itself with relationality and embodiment (and situatedness as seen beyond objective location/position), analysing how actors in different situations connect and invent with each other. The grounding of this view of subjectivity in psychoanalysis and situationism is evident. Its premise is that identities are abandoned in favour of new becomings, of new, creative and unpredictable pathways of experience and self-understanding. Power relations are here seen to run with equal force from the psychic and micropolitical to the macropolitical, thus a struggle against oppression or fascism can not privilege relations at the level of the state or social over those occurring between, within and across people. Akin to Simondonian individuation, 'becoming' here means to move beyond the constituted self, and politics must address it as such.

Transversal encounters deterritorialize, in that they make new dimensions of the common emerge. The common is here something that always needs to be invented, never to be taken for granted. According to a politics of identity, the common pre-exists to the extent that there are shared experiences based on shared discriminations. With a politics of transversality, the common always needs to emerge, and this emergence cannot be thought on the basis of sociological categories only.

In my work here, I think care and collectivity across those two perspectives, moving between analyses of specific social movements and their compositions while opening onto a questioning of the lines of force and in/visibility that run through them, and the singular processes of collective action and life they give onto. The point here could hardly be to discard one approach in favour of the other, since clearly it is crucial to both depart from given stratifications of power and identity whilst also unsettling them and giving way to other modes of thinking, feeling and presenting oneself, whether as a group or an individual. In the face of an abundance of objectivism and identity politics in contemporary contexts of the radical left as much as NGO and neo-communitarian culture (the fabrication of 'local communities' or new regionalisms), I tend to affirm transversality more, however.

What interests me here is the way these approaches may find different articulations with each other in collective processes, and how they correspond to the images of the network and the chain in some ways. Cutting diagonally across, beyond fixed identitarian lines, is a method suited to a network context and analysis, where relations may be flexible and heterogeneous, event-like. Much theorising of networked social movements draws on this, as do the organisational politics of precarity for example, by eschewing strict sociological definitions of what constitutes a precarious person. A checklist of the Precarious Workers Brigade illustrates how definitions of precarity draw on affect and self-understanding as much as on formal status:

1. Are you unsure what job you will be doing in 3 months?
2. Do you freelance and don't feel free?
3. Are you anxious during the day and sleepless at night?
4. Has the carrot you were promised gone off?
5. Do you think you will never own a house in your fucking life?⁴⁸

The politics of intersectionality are frequently used in studies of care chains, looking at the specific embodied experiences of migrant care workers for instance, and analysing class, gender and racial compositions and stratifications. They are useful for understanding the macropolitical dimensions of care, migration and work for example, yet may be problematic if taken as matters of identity politics rather than as lived and common experiences. In order to get at a politics that can address both transformations of work and life, that can think collective practice and organisation in terms of heteronomy as well as autonomy, it is necessary to read across those contexts.

Constitutive outsides: care chains and creative networks

To the context within which this research sits – the academy, post-Fordism, precarious networks and militant experiments – care might be said to constitute an ‘outside’. I trace the way this manifests in relation to work and organisation, across my chapters. Care is however a constitutive outside – not an absolute one, not an exteriority – no inside would exist without this constituting outside, without the attention and labours that reproduction entails. Where in theorizing ‘Organized Networks’⁴⁹, Ned Rossiter argues that institutions may function as constitutive outside of networks and vice versa, I add that while reproduction is often seen as outside work and networks, it is indeed

⁴⁸ Precarious Workers Brigade (2010) Flyer. See the group's blog.

⁴⁹ Rossiter, N. (2006). *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions*. NAi Publishers: Rotterdam and the Institute of Network Cultures: Amsterdam.

constitutive of them, and needs to be recognised as such.

In early 2011, I engaged in an email interview with Rossiter, and asked him where he thinks an analysis of the relations between creative networks and care chains would need to start and what it would need to take into account and beware of. He responded:

Maybe start with a diagram of relations. For sure the concept and politics of labour needs to be expanded beyond a kind of narcissistic joy of self-recognition. This is the danger of affirmation, unless we see affirmation as a registration of difference, conflict and the constitutive outside. Think of the diagram of labour within the IT industries in Kolkata - without the act of primitive accumulation by the corporate-state, where the land of peasants is expropriated in the interests of property development, there is no IT industry and no cognitive labour to address as a potential political constituency. In other words, the diagram of the outside of IT labour is precisely the scene of the political. With the dispossession of farming land, the subjectivity of the peasant is effectively programmed into the subject of care work as domestic labour, security, construction and service labour. The more skilled labour of the IT worker does not exist without this relation. How to develop a mode of organization and analysis shaped by these variabilities is indeed a key challenge.⁵⁰

This response sums up my stakes here very well. While I cannot claim to give a full account of the configuration and re-configuration of subjectivities across the care/creativity nexus, my attempt here is to trace a subjectivity that shifts from creativity to care, from work to reproduction, in the moment of crisis. Drawing on an understanding of those chains of expropriation and accumulation that allow for the production of the creative subject in the first place, I am witnessing the moment when this subject becomes unviable due to failing economies and austerity, and yet again needs to confront its social and bodily reproduction outside of the automations of the bubble. For this, it is necessary to understand the chains that allow for the network to appear so free-floating, so perfectly smooth and functional: so perfectly self-organised. Self-organisation that has the potential and power to challenge capital proper needs to operate on the level of the chain as well as the network, re-wiring them to the tune of

⁵⁰ Email correspondence with Ned Rossiter, January-June 2011.

the common in its material as well as immaterial aspects.

Having exposed the key contextual and methodological settings of this investigation, we now begin to go more in depth with its separate aspects. Given that I conceive of this study along cartographical and networked lines, where we are not so much along a linear path of narration but in a field of interconnected relations, it isn't really that important what we start with here. The reason the arrangement of chapters at this point confronts the question of work, is however contingent in historical and personal terms: it is this question that stands at the centre of my work with London collectives as I begin my research (working on free labour and internships in the cultural sector notably, in 2008/09), and that also inaugurates the pathway that many precarity related struggles take, moving from a focus on labour towards broader issues to do with life and its reproduction (as we shall see in chapter A.3).

SECTION A : WORK, ECONOMICS,
PRECARITY

Introduction to section on Work

I begin my detailed account of creativity and care in relation to work and its crisis. What do we mean when we say ‘work’ today? What does work mean to us? In the rhetorics of UK Prime Minister David Cameron and his neoliberal likes,¹ the current economic crisis reinforces the ideology of ‘work’ – where austerity measures and the further devaluing of wage labour are argued to lead towards job creation and employment (‘global competitiveness’). This dark tunnel of austerity is paved with a mix of authoritarian and communitarian affirmations of work: work as a must, and its refusal or rebellion as capital economic sin; as well as work as sweet voluntary activity, beneficial beyond the context of crisis. The articulation of the ‘Big Society’ with the strike-breaking, iron-handed politics of cuts and privatizations are reflected in Cameron’s ‘We’re all in this together’: indeed this combination of soft control and tough discipline are echoed across other European countries undergoing the economic whitewash called ‘austerity’. Angela Merkel calls on Europe to pull together for global competitiveness, arguing that only a lowering of wages can bring back the bliss of fuller employment.² At the end of the tunnel seems to stand the tacit idea of abundant work, work as universal ‘good’ that has to be duly earned in the global marketplace. ‘Work’ as comfortably couched within logics of growth, development and the nation state.

Yet for many, positive ideas of work are hardly accessible in today’s context. Particularly from the viewpoint of the precarious, unemployed and paperless, these show themselves to be nothing but empty words hollering down a bottomless pit of colonialism, patriarchal containment and capitalist crisis. In remembering the interlinking of impasses across those paradigms, I choose to speak about the current ‘crisis’ as a reproductive one above all, as reproductive crisis of a system based in the articulations of sexist, racist and classist mechanisms. Work is somewhat at the centre of this crisis, as is life: the point of impasse we are witnessing concerns the organisation of the everyday as much as that of (formal-waged) work. And as such, in a broader

¹ For an instance of such discourse relating austerity and job creation, see Wearden, G. and Elliott, L. (2013), ‘Angela Merkel tells Davos Austerity must continue’ in *The Guardian*, 24th January 2013.

² *Ibid.*

sense, this crisis may also be referred to as ecological and economic, as concerning the interrelation of life forms and the oikos.

What can the creation of more precarious jobs and the promotion of voluntary and free labour do for a social body that is as sick of work as it is of unemployment? As neoliberal austerity appears to imply a becoming-feudal of work – protruding class divisions and ownership relations towards levels hardly seen since at least the rise of welfare states – that leaves our attachments to this notion in tatters, the plastering over loopy debt economies and bursting bubbles hardly inspires any trust in the spheres of economy or political representation. Crisis of representation, of institutions, economic crisis. This first section focuses on the question of work and economics, opening onto later reflections on organisation, collective constitution and representation.

The Krisis Collective puts it strongly in their Manifesto against Labor: ‘Labour is a coercive social principle, and while it may have served to mobilize workers against capital at one point in history, it is now so engrained in neoliberal ideology that we might as well consider it dead.’³ As workfare replaces welfare and managerialisms invade every space of what we previously considered our work (and lives), we witness a deep tension in the relation between work and life. If we can no longer map our existences onto the couplet spheres of work/life or private/public, where might we look to for new imaginaries and practices that structure our activities, relations and survival?

My point of departure here is creative labour. Artists are the prototypes of the self-submitting subjectivity that post-Fordist exploitation runs on. Their ‘self’ is one motivated, engaged, aspiring, constantly reproducing itself through loops of individualism and competitiveness. Life and work merge. This subjectivity constitutes one pole of my research on what it means to call something ‘work’. The creative industries have been a role model for managing precarious and free labour, and their production and use of a flexible, individualized subjectivity has its mirrors across many other industries. In this dynamic, ‘work’ becomes not just an activity, not just a job, not just for some hours of the day, but a constant engagement, an enforced substitute for the meanings we may gather in ‘life.’⁴ How can we escape that subjectivity and world where everything becomes work, money, abstract? This question is not rhetorical but rather constitutes the basis of imagining an emancipatory politics today.

³ Krisis-Group (1999) *Manifesto against labour*, Blog entry.

⁴ See also Harney, S. (2008) *Abolition and the General Intellect*, paper given at a seminar on ‘Governance and the global commons’ at QMUL London, 5 June 2008,

Our souls are at work, Bifo Berardi says in speaking of some of the pathologies and impasses of contemporary precarious labour.⁵ As various theorists have pointed out,⁶ it is regimes of self-control that make us work, that bring us to say time and again, ‘I have to work’. For different subjects, this exclamation has different meanings of course. This thesis focuses on young European precarious workers, as well as migrants and people engaged in reproductive and informal labour. Its point of departure is the realm of arts and cultural work frequently known as the ‘Creative Industries’.

Much self-initiated research and political organising has happened in the creative sector in recent years, investigating working conditions in these fields and calling for creative work to be adequately paid.⁷ While claiming pay is key in the current context, we find that organising around labour has its limits, as it leaves us reactive to exploitation, missing a perspective that allows us to look beyond wage-slavery and its capitalist roots more generally. As work simultaneously comes to be made abstract (a broader activity broken down into jobs or tasks; such as care and creative work in their becoming-industry and becoming-service) and precarious (employed in small specific portions, switched on and off according to market needs), it no longer presents itself as an end in itself. We want a way out of precarity that gives us back the joys and meaningfulness of activity, the ability to relate what we do to life, to conceive of ourselves not just as ‘workers’ but as subjects that invent and care.

It is the capacity of innovation, of the ‘production of forms of life’, and thus the creation of surplus value that defines human activity, not the fact of belonging to a determined industrial sector.⁸

In post-industrial capitalism, we no longer identify with work as the lifelong dedication to a sector, but self-valorize our capacities to shift sectors, manage projects and multitask. High vulnerability ensues as we move back and forth between jobs, projects, home, between paid and unpaid work. The desire to exit work-obsessed subjectivity overlaps with the need to invent other means of organizing survival. In attempting to respond to these urgent necessities, this thesis points to collective and cooperative

⁵ Berardi, F. (2009). *The soul at work : from alienation to autonomy*. Los Angeles, CA, Semiotext(e).

⁶ See for instance: Holmes, B. (2002). *The flexible Personality*. [Eipcp Webjournal](#).

⁷ My main points of reference here are: the Precarious Workers Brigade, the Carrot Workers Collective, the Creadores Invisibles, Serpica Naro, Making a Living (UK), R:08 (Spain), Kulturometer, the Euromayday Movements.

⁸ Marazzi, C. (2011). *Capitalismo macchinico e plusvalore di rete: note sull’economia politica della macchina di Turing*. Uninomade Website. See also Morini, C. (2010). *El trabajo de cuidado como arquetipo del biocapitalismo*. [Swarm Webjournal](#).

contexts that can support people and allow them to grow, whether as groups, networks, production units or family-like assemblages. In view of a reinvention of how we ‘work’ on levels collective, subjective, social as well as material, how might we organise our work and lives differently?

‘I worked all day and night to finish the project’ – a phrase that speaks of strain but also of a strong engagement. ‘I stayed up three nights struggling with my child’s fever’ – a labour of love that’s more than ‘just a job’. Under what conditions do we want to work to unfold both our creativity and care? The creative industries mobilize our desires of invention and imagination towards voluntary, free labour that’s often rather fragmented and unfulfilling. The third sector mobilizes our desires to care and support towards voluntary labour. Patriarchal capitalism keeps the bulk of women’s care work unrecognized and stuck to the private home. The ‘big society’ of NGOs and unpaid work threatens to bear upon our ideas of self-organization, of intimacy and familiarity: in this context, a mere struggle around work has little force, since what is at stake are desires, affects and dreams. In these contexts, beyond valuing ‘work’, we perhaps need to value self-organisation otherwise. Thus whilst departing from contexts of creative labour, what this thesis documents is a shift towards matters of care and self-organisation – moving to integrate concerns about ‘work’ into concerns about ‘life’ so as to open broader imaginaries of social and economic organisation.

To be sure, the new work ethic of ‘creative’ or ‘cognitive’ labour (two aspects of action and process that are hardly extractable or harvestable as pure qualities, hence my referring to them will sometimes come under inverted commas here) differs from that of the self-sacrificing subjectivity of familial care labour - just as the precarious creative worker in the global north differs from the subaltern worker pulled and swept to the shores of wealthy nations to do the dirty work. A field of many differentiations, but at the core of it is a neoliberal, sometimes neo-communitarian plexus that’s somewhat shared: a world where labour and life are reshuffled beyond (and before) the industrial paradigm, and new struggles for autonomy and self-reproduction open up. Some come to this kind of work because they are privileged enough to desire it as self-realization, others desire it as their only horizon for survival, others again see it as natural for them to do what they do. All these feed into a system that relies on informal, undocumented, underpaid and unpaid work in order to keep up its exploitation of ‘work’ as waged labour.

In this section, I ask to what extent it is through notions of ‘work’ that activities of care and creativity can be appropriately valorized and sustained. At stake here is a reading across modes and kinds of works – across the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of work, by way of which care and creativity come to be understood not just as kinds of work but also as functions of activity, as modes of working. This double reflection on work as formal and informal runs throughout these reflections on ‘when do we call something *work*’, and echoes in different formulations across the different discourses and contexts I will be exploring. My key references in addressing this question come from feminist and Autonomist theories, as well as postcolonial ones, each throwing a different light on the question of work, care and creativity. Indeed ways of understanding of ‘work’ differs depending on whether one looks at it from the side of formal or informal economies, feminized labour or the male wage, colonial exploitation or citizenship. The negotiation of ‘work’ is considerably complex within as well as across these – while this first section dedicates itself to thinking through ‘work’ as creative and caring activity, later sections will link these fields with dimensions of migration and self-organisation.

Thus Chapter A.1 explores definitions of work, departing from more subjective perspectives articulated in interviews with people doing creative and caring work. With these voices in mind, it then passes through some different theoretical conceptualizations of work, notably from the 70s and after, since at stake here is the neoliberal configuration of work and its other(s).

Chapter A2 moves on to examine definitions of work and economy from a feminist perspective, looking at definitional stakes and struggles in relation to more macropolitical matters. This chapter introduces the problem of reproductive and invisible labour more broadly, opening to the considerations about contemporary uses of free labour that are explored in relation to governance in chapter C.1.

The third chapter in this section on work, A.3, introduces the term precarity in some detail, presenting the movements and discussions surrounding it since the early 2000s. It again draws on feminist appropriations and critiques of this concept, grounding the practices that come to be discussed in more depth in section B on organization.

A.1 Care, creativity and work: narratives and questions

The basic sense of the word, to indicate activity and effort or achievement, has thus been modified, though unevenly and incompletely, by a definition of its imposed conditions, such as 'steady' or timed work, or working for a wage or salary: being hired.¹

What do we call 'work'?

When do we call an activity 'work?' The word 'work' does not have a stable referent across contexts – what it means depends on where, when and how it is referred to. One may say that one of the shifts in meaning of 'work' has been and is a displacement from meaning 'industrious' activity towards referring to 'industrial' activity via the service industries. As Raymond Williams shows in his excavation of some historical developments of the use of this term, its basic sense has been modified quite considerably throughout the centuries. While it used to simply refer to 'activity, effort or achievement', it was further on 'modified by a definition of its imposed conditions'²:

The specialization of work to paid employment is the result of the development of capitalist productive relations. To be *in work* or *out of work* was to be in a definite relationship with some other who had control of the means of productive effort. *Work* then shifted from the productive effort itself to the predominant social relationship.³

'Working' in this case becomes less a matter of activity and rather a matter of the

¹ Williams, R. (1988). *Work*. In: Keywords : a vocabulary of culture and society. London, Fontana Press.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

framing of an activity in a certain kind of social relationship. Whereas some self-driven activities used to be and are easily colloquially referred to as *work*, particularly in the context of an organization of life that centers around agriculture and the home (such as field- or garden work and housework), ‘work’ begins to shift to denote not just an activity but rather a social relationship with the industrialization of different forms of production and reproduction. As feminists have pointed out,⁴ women’s work is the prototype activity that sits uneasily within definitions of work, especially in view of the social relationship underpinning it, yet it is an indispensable ‘other’ side to industrial work. This social relationship differs from that of waged employment, or employment as such and is thus often considered non-work or at least a different kind of work. Similar considerations concern the field of creative labour. What the understanding of work in the contexts of creativity and care have in common is that they have only recently shifted from being understood as work that may well be ‘industrious’ (diligent and hard-working) towards being ‘industrial’ (part of an industry, framed by policy and regulations). Across different chapters in this project, I address some stakes in understanding and reinventing what ‘work’ may mean in these two contexts.

‘You mean my real work, or the work I do for money?’⁵ - the Carrot Workers Collective, quoting other cultural workers

How do precarious workers perceive their own work? I am introducing fragments of some interviews done as part of the Carrot Workers Collective in London⁶ – a group organising around creative labour – to get at some such perceptions here. The Carrot Workers point to the contradictions around defining work in an interview called ‘What is work worth?’, in referring to the answer they often get when asking cultural workers what they do: ‘you mean my real work, or the work I do for money?’⁷. Listening back to an audio track I recorded during a one-on-one mapping conversation at an event that brought together artists and cultural workers, I come across several interesting discussions conditions of work and life. As part of the Carrot Workers, myself and a friend facilitated those reflections via an exercise to map temporalities and patterns of working in the cultural field – the temporalities of ‘Making a Living’, as the event was

⁴ See for instance Werlhof, C. V. (2010). *Vom Diesseits der Utopie zum Jenseits der Gewalt*. Freiburg, Centaurus Verlag.

⁵ See Landgraff, A. and Carrot Workers Collective (2012) *What is work worth?*, in FUSE Magazine.

⁶ This is one of the groups as part of which I did much of the research on the topic of creative labour and internships that is reflected in these chapters.

⁷ See Landgraff, A. and Carrot Workers Collective (2012), *What is work worth?*

called⁸.

At the beginning of a file I had named ‘time mapping ACF – more quiet – single’, a young woman’s voice comes up, speaking with a mix of nonchalance and haste, in British English with a Slavic accent:

YOUNG WOMAN: And then I had a period when I spent a lot of time applying basically, and looking for jobs, yeah...

ME: When was that?

YW: That was pretty much from January to May, I’ve been doing a lot of it...

ME: Let’s draw it in, no?

YW: Till here, yes. (draws on the diagram) ... and then I’ve been making... working on my own projects, that were unpaid, a lot, since then, so I was not applying much lately but just working, but as not paid...⁹

Mixed up in this snippet account of paid and unpaid time, there are two key understandings of ‘work’ – the paid work of the ‘job’ (possibly waged) and the free work of the art ‘project’. Yet the differentiation is not easy, since one feeds into the other: the free work of ‘applications’ and ‘projects’ (ideally) brings about paid ‘jobs’ (possibly in the form of waged labour). Applications in this account lead both to waged jobs and to arts funding (mostly based on fees infinitely smaller than what an appropriate wage would come to). This resembles a conversation with another woman at the same event – I find it in a file called ‘time mapping ACF – busy’. Many voices overlapping, I can make out a strand of conversation between myself and a woman who sounds like she’s in her late 30s, British, sounding calm and curious. As I listen in I remember she told me she was an arts tutor:

ARTS TUTOR: Yeah, generally I mean I do - I do the cleaning... yeah I mean we haven’t got kids or anything but I do the cleaning and stuff... so there’s housework... but I only do it now and then, I don’t do that much... it is significant, at the same time I’m doing [...] that I wish I didn’t have to, but it has

⁸ This was an event organized by Sophie Hope and co-facilitated with Veronica Restrepo, and constituted an attempt to bring together cultural workers to discuss conditions and potential ways of organizing in the context of cultural production. It was held in September 2009 at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London.

⁹ Interview to map un/paid time, ‘Making a Living’ Event, as part of Carrot Workers.

to be done...

ME: And you can also insert whatever time you spend preparing for teaching, or, where you're not actually getting paid (pointing to the diagram)

AT: *That's lots...*

ME: ...writing applications, all this sort of stuff [...]

AT: *Yeah...*

ME: [looking] So this would mean you're spending a hell of a lot of time, this would mean [...]

AT: *I mean this is, it is kind of variable... variable amounts of time... doing applications... some meetings are unpaid, some university meetings are unpaid...*¹⁰

Here again there is a range of uses of the term 'work': the unpaid labour in the home, the unpaid labour of administration, preparation and meetings, as well as the paid (and mostly waged) labour of teaching, some paid attendance at meetings. In just two accounts of instances of time spent we find many ways of labouring: waged labour, paid one-off jobs, unpaid labour that sits at the far end of paid work, unpaid work that is preparatory and perhaps never results in paid work, unpaid work that functions to maintain the home and make life more pleasant, unpaid work that makes the lives of others more pleasant, and so on. In some of those instances, work has a positive connotation (doing 'my' work/projects, and to a lesser extent, doing waged work), while in others it appears as a murky activity that is hard to speak about (cleaning the home, doing applications, unpaid preparation and meetings) or as a dire necessity ('jobs'). Let's briefly pull them apart for the sake of clarity, even if making a clear separation is a move unimaginable for the speaking subjects above.

Formal/informal, waged/unwaged, paid/unpaid¹¹

It is useful to distinguish between pay, wages and degrees of formality in work. Paid labour can concern formal and informal economies alike, yet it is much more concentrated in the formal sector where it has become institutionalized via the wage (at least this is how I speak of the wage here, as somewhat formal regular payment). The wage regulates what work is worth in accordance with the larger economy, the desired profits of the workplace as well as with state regulation such as the minimum wage.

¹⁰ Interview to map un/paid time, 'Making a Living' Event, as part of Carrot Workers.

¹¹ See also Appendix 3 for Diagram on Formal-Informal Work.

Thus, waged labour concentrates in the formal sector while informal work may be paid via fees as much as wages, remaining outside of contracts and laws.

Much informal work is very badly paid and unpaid: workers have no legal ground to demand fair pay by recourse to the state, rather having to hide from it, since the state criminalizes a large part of informal economic activity. Thus a person without papers or a person doing illegalized work (such as sex work in some places) may get paid, yet their hourly rate or fee is often below what the minimum wage sets out in the formal economy. The informal economy however also includes huge amounts of unpaid labour, such as housework, care work, self-driven project work, etc. Such unpaid labour depends either on an extra wage or other paid informal activities for survival, sometimes done by one and the same person (the mother who also ‘works’, formally) or by another person (the husband whose wage the mother depends on).

Across all those different manifestations of labour, it is not always a wage, or even pay, that workers desire – it might be another form of autonomy, as well as recognition, respect and rights more largely. We can hear some feminist echoes in the above account of doing house-work, yet they are not so much based on a desire to be paid for cleaning at home, but in a sense of inequality in the couple, where the woman is seen as responsible for those tasks. To what extent it is desirable and feasible to pursue a wage-centered, or indeed even labour-centered politics in domains such as care and creativity, where free and underpaid work, and indeed informal organizational modes are the norm? I take care and creative labour to be a relevant pair to think through because they significantly complicate – in different ways – conceptual doubles such as productivity/reproduction and work/leisure. I am focusing on conceptualizations stemming from Autonomist, feminist and postcolonial contexts, since they have paid most attention to those forms of labouring activity which both struggle to be valued and resist being organized as abstract labour.

Remembering an interview I did with my grandmother many years ago,¹² I find a similar resonance. She raised seven children while being a farmer, doing two ‘informal’ unpaid full-time jobs at once. Yet she would never be found to complain of never having had ‘a job’ or of not having been waged. The relationality of her caring labour

¹² Interview with Irma Zechner, *See/Austria*, 2006. In: Zechner, M. (2006-2007). *Histoires*. Documentary Film. Austria, France: 60 Mins.

and even of her farm work differs strongly from that of an abstract, contracted and waged relation. In some aspects and contexts the former is more autonomous, in some it is more dependent than the latter. To make herself be waged (who would have been her employer - her husband or the state?) or paid on and off (while child benefit was crucial for the survival of the family-economy, getting a fee for her work would ring of a fee for reproduction, utterly inappropriate to the project of running a farm and subsisting on much of the self-made produce, and through the family) would have involved a compromise she probably wouldn't have engaged.

Entering into a wage relation, becoming a 'worker' dependent on a boss, entails a significant loss of autonomy and changes the character of 'work'. While subjected to a patriarchal system of home based labour, dependent on her husband (the person who was legally responsible for the farm) and the state (for benefits here and there), she saw that her sisters who went to work in the garment factory were not so much better off.

The desire to make meaning: making the family work, making work to be remembered by

In this interview, my grandmother speaks about her life in terms of her relation to labour, her body and other bodies. I recorded the conversation for a film I was making at the time – entitled 'historées', as it deals with processes of biographical narration of two women in their 80s, one a farmer (my grandmother) and one an artist. While these women's ways of investing meaning in their labour differ substantially – one speaks of care, hard labour and the home while the other speaks of creativity, inspiration, art 'work' and the atelier – their situations and attitudes vis-à-vis formal economies share some similarities. Neither of them ever saw a wage, and both of them appear strongly attached to their labour/work, as something very meaningful to them.

Ties of kinship and motherhood hold together my grandmothers' narrative of a life of hard work, as well as an uncanny account of technological 'progress'. Speaking of how technology affected her, she says:

Then in '57 we got electricity. And along with the electricity we got a washing machine, and a freezer, that was the first we got back then... and up till then we'd had to do everything by hand. The kids were in school, further away, they

only came home three times a year, and they brought packets of washing... like at Christmas, the doctor gave me a pill - it was called 'Reaktion' I still remember that to this day... I didn't get any sleep. I worked through three days and nights, so I could do all the washing and so it would be dry again by the time the kids leave.

Then slowly, slowly it all got better. Machines were introduced in the fields. Initially we'd had to lift everything by hand but then came a machine that made bundles [of hay]. And then... Till in the end there was the combine harvester... so these days, it takes three days to do the farm's [Wirtschaft] work...¹³

It is not easy to see a beginning and end to work in this life where childcare, housework and farm work overlap and flow into each other seamlessly, day and night. Hard and industrious work, day and night, sustaining not just her family but also a larger post-war economy. Yet only very little of it counts as work on paper for this woman – she lived from her own produce and from what her husband could sell of it, never making money herself. At least the welfare state of the time entitled her to child benefits and furthermore to her husband's pension, granting her a modest basis for survival. In current neoliberal societies such a basis becomes increasingly less imaginable: increasingly, an end to work only comes with an end to life. Like the farmer woman, the teacher and artist cited above work more or less ceaselessly, and for them too much of it this labour unpaid. Yet the prospects of their work eventually leading to a pension are meagre.

What is a life of work that isn't so much a life of making money? Many women – and to a lesser yet growing extent, men – labour ceaselessly between more formal and informal 'fields', the cornfield and the children's room, the bedroom desk and the office. Between paid and unpaid, formal and informal work, people are holding together a wide net of relations (mostly of kinship, but not only), surviving in and through this web and making this web survive. An endless chain of mediating activities and relations, both at home and in the formal economy. The labours of my grandmother concerned holding an extensive family together, making things 'work out' for her seven children and their respective children. My Parisian artist friend also dedicated her life to holding together relations, of a strong community of students (who to this day continue to dance in her

¹³ Irma Zechner, *Ibid.*

studio and remember her, years after her death), and her binding device was ‘creativity’, or art, or culture – her ‘work’ consisted of drawings, dances and teaching methods. Interestingly, both these approaches are somewhat based in a perspective towards the future and towards coming generations.

What both these women have in common is a special relation to autopoiesis,¹⁴ to the self-driven making and sustaining of meanings and bodies, somewhat off the shores of state regulation and market pressure, building other bonds through which to sustain life. Like any other worker, they are never quite ‘autonomous’, whether financially or socially – unlike wage labourers, they are not bound by contracts and regulations, but by social hierarchies and bonds of love. An ambivalent situation: financial precarity is compensated through strong networks of support and poetic and social abundance. Although in very different ways, the farmer-mother and artist-teacher share this ‘other’ way of making a living and relating to people.

What does it matter who is calling something ‘work’?

The spectrum of the question ‘what does it mean to call an activity work’ is a broad one, and it has many different answers depending on the context in which it is put forward. Across this thesis, I am coming at this question from different angles. This question has personal and political implications: calling something ‘work’ can produce a shift in what an activity means to us as well as what it can mean to another, and it can produce a shift in what an activity means in the face of laws and policies. What is at stake in calling something ‘work’ depends not just on the historical and geographical context of a speaking subject (individual or collective) but also on the constitution of the body concerned: what generation, what localisation, what nationality, what sex, what colour of skin, what kind of body? These to a large extent condition the desirability and feasibility of framing something as ‘work’ and having it recognized and valorized as such by others and institutions.

Different scenes of work and different scenes of speech: the 1950s, a farm, an office, the 1990s, a living room, the year 2010. Different means of work and different means of narration: feeding a child, cleaning the floor, filling in an application form, marking schoolwork, attending meetings, cooking food, crossing borders. Can the term ‘work’ in

¹⁴ See for instance the work of Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana on Self-creating systems.

any way sum up the experiences and relations at stake across these moments? Different subjects and different positions: the black nanny, the white nanny, the male citizen, the teenage refugee, and the young artist. There are subjective as well as strategic reasons for why and how people speak of work – more than any other, ‘work’ is a reflexive term referring to ways of envisaging the activity of self or other, alongside being subject to transformations of organisational, technological and economic paradigms. What stable referent is there to ‘work’ across history? It denotes an activity that helps people live, but its forms differ vastly.

The effect of a speech act concerning work is thus determined by the history of a speaking subject in a double way. On the one hand, subjectively - with respect to their exposure to certain discourses and practices - and on the other hand with regards to their status as bodies and subjects: what they *can* say if they want to be heard. My examples here to a large extent concern female bodies, and bodies engaging in self-organized activity that resembles – or indeed brings together – the work of care and of creativity. Between the invention of modes of life and the care of others, between economics and poetry, between an office and a kitchen, a political meeting and a diary – how do people make sense of ‘work’?

I have chosen to depart from instances of narration that I have lived with, not as authentic points of departure but as poles and experiential markers that hold together my questions as much as references to academic texts might do. Those experiential contexts bring me to this question: what do we call work, and what difference does it make? My investigation will touch upon this question from different angles and at different points, rather than attempt to provide an all-encompassing answer.

Throughout this as well as other chapters, it will become clear that while creative and care work share many similarities as forms of labour, the subjects engaging in them pertain to quite different class backgrounds usually, and also race and gender backgrounds. It is not by coincidence that in the present interviews on creative work, we hear voices of young precarious women, some of them migrants, often from middle class backgrounds. Their discourses echo a gendered insecurity about whether what they do merits to be called work, at the same time as a critical doubt about the implications of such acts of naming. The stakes in speaking of ‘work’ in instances of care and

creative work accordingly differ as much as they coincide.

Caring and creative labour have increasingly entered the market sphere in the last 30 years and become subject to state regulations. There are volumes written¹⁵ and songs to be sung about the internal tensions inherent in forms of labouring activity that oscillate between self-organisation and entrepreneurialism, between subsistence and market logics. In what follows, I will attempt to trace some key contradictions and resistances by pointing to categories that have been frequently used to articulate differences between more and less formal working activities and their orientation towards either alternative economies or the mainstream capitalist economy (which, though they are co-dependent, are however still distinct in my view) – keeping in mind that those conceptualizations arise from specific situations, were articulated by specific subjects at specific moments. Many of these perspectives build a cross-historical dialogue, referring to one another.

Speaking of ‘work’ historically and politically: some instances

Waged and reproductive labour

In western Europe, 18th century cultures of enlightenment thought – forging ideas of civility, rights, social contracts and equality – ran parallel to processes of industrialization, forging new modalities of producing and organizing work. In this context, much of the activity of organizing and sustaining livelihoods shifted from more local and familial modes (closer to subsistence) towards broader, anonymous and massified industrial models. ‘Work’ gained the status of large-scale technologically organized and waged activity as the factory became the paradigm for thinking about it. This is the context from which classical economic theory emerged and framed the modality in which people like Karl Marx thought about labour and politics. At the basis of classical economic as well as Marxist theory we find the wage form, in the former functioning to institutionalise and perpetuate the exploitation at the heart of capitalism, in the latter criticized and developed as a tool to contest this very exploitation.

While these conceptual frameworks and their ambivalence still concerns us today, we

¹⁵ See for instance the work of Franco Berardi, Emilia Armano, Suely Rolnik, Brian Holmes, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (as referenced in the bibliography of this thesis).

find that they need to be rethought in contemporary contexts of neoliberalism. Particularly since the 1970s, in post-operaist thought, Marxist conceptions of labour hint towards extensions and discontinuities of the conceptions of wage and labour, pointing to the transformative potentials of new forms of work. Encapsulated in various concepts such as ‘immaterial labour’, ‘post-Fordism’ and ‘affective labour’, these ways of thinking about waged labour – hovering over its potentials for emancipation – have emerged in Italy to a large extent, and been translated into various contexts. Creative labour has been an important context in which such thought has been experimented with variously, identified as ‘new’ in its organization via policy that brings together various forms of small-scale ‘creative’ activity to make a powerful market segment. The concept of ‘affective labour’ has allowed for a bridge to be built between ‘cognitive’ or ‘immaterial’ conceptions of labour and the more bodily aspects of labour, opening transversal relations between feminism and post-operaism – without however going so far as to address reproduction itself.¹⁶

Illustration 2 in the Appendix tries to map out the terminological fields around modes of labour that are discussed here, in positioning them according to their relations to state and market. In it, I have roughly indicated the ‘range’ of different conceptualizations through demarcating the area to which they may apply. As these *modes of labour* – concerning the *how* of working activity – will come to be discussed below, it will be useful to keep in mind that they do not correspond to specific *types or forms of labour* – the *what* of work (such as care, creative, cognitive, service labour and so forth). Furthermore I will point to some historical paradigms in which specific *paradigms of labour organisation* emerge, such as the moments of industrialisation, Taylorism or post/Fordism. In the context of my study across contexts of neoliberal governance, post-Fordism and crisis policies of austerity and neo-communitarianism, certain modes of labour take on more weight than others: such as reproductive work, free labour, shadow work and subsistence work.¹⁷

‘Reproduction’ – Alisa del Re

Across Marxist-inspired women’s struggles of the 1970s, ‘reproductive labour’ was a key paradigm. Those struggles often centered around the wage form,¹⁸ attempting to

¹⁶ See for instance: Clough, P. T. and J. O. M. Halley (2007). *The affective turn : theorizing the social*. Durham, N.C., Duke University Press ; Chesham : Combined Academic [distributor].

¹⁷ See also Appendix 5 with Diagram on Modes of Work in relation to State and Market (in Capitalism)

¹⁸ Since the specific use of the term ‘reproductive’ stands in relation to capitalist waged work (the other

bring recognition and independence to women's domestic work via an importation of the wage logic to this field and through campaigns such as 'wages for housework'.¹⁹ In the face of a welfare state that can pay fair wages or benefits for such work, this can be a useful claim to make – an acceptable compromise particularly where it means replacing an intangible father's or husband's authority for a state authority that can be contested via rights. Yet as Alisa del Re points out, 'To ask for a salary for housework points to something like a citizen's, or basic, rent'²⁰ – ultimately the desirable horizon is not the quantification of care work and its exposure to competition and wage dumping, but to envisage a guaranteed and universal basic income that can reframe the definition of work altogether. Such an income would have to be a social right and conform 'to the reproductive needs of people, not pegged to work or the social production of value'.

To be sure, the application of the wage to more forms of activity does not necessarily resolve relations of power and privilege, and the making 'productive' of 'reproductive' or subsistence tasks requires systems of exploitation to be in place whereby the wages of some are higher than those of others. This implies an expansion of the service industries, through which women and subaltern subjects more generally enter the labour market, serving those whose wages can afford to pay for services. Thus internal contradictions in capitalism – which the wage always also serves to exploit, in order to produce surplus value – both stand in tension and murky complicity with wage-based campaigns. To recognize this tension does not mean to disavow the powers of the exploitation that forms of patriarchy and capitalism perpetuate: yet the question of how to speak of work remains complicated.

'Middle term' – Dipesh Chakrabarty

In this context, being torn somewhat hopelessly between affirming 'work' and wages and trying to move away from it, it comes to appear important to investigate potential politics of self-organised, informal labour, and the *processes of translation* between those and abstract labour as they occur in the care and creative domains. Dipesh Chakrabarty's work is a major point of inspiration for this questioning, asking 'how

side of production), I have placed reproduction towards the top part of the 'unpaid' side of Appendix 5. Reproduction as such differs from subsistence since in a capitalist context it is bound to the state, the wage, welfare.

¹⁹ For one contemporary continuation of this movement, see Selma James's current project, the Global Womens Strike which includes a campaign for payment of caring work.

²⁰ Re, A. D. (2008). *Lessico Maxiano*. Rome, Manifestolibri. My translation from Italian.

translations [...] take for their model of exchange barter rather than the generalized exchange of commodities, which always needs the mediation of a universal, homogenizing middle term (such as work/labour)'.²¹ If indeed care and creative work are traditionally exempt from commodity status and thus from generalized exchange, they are bound to other, more patriarchal and clerical-aristocratic-bourgeois, power structures. How and when does reference to 'work' as a mediating term open possibilities for transformations, and how and when does it close down potential negotiations and struggles? If 'work' as a term mediates a person's activity with state and market, then clearly these negotiations can be of many kinds and need to be carefully differentiated. Moreover, it may be helpful to look beyond barter and generalized exchange, particularly to understand caring activity: we may also posit the model of the gift and of debt, as Deleuze-Guattari and Graeber point out.²² Indeed relations of care mostly pass through gift-like labours that produce bonds of non-monetary indebtedness. (This indebtedness is the strong glue holding together family relations.)

The question at stake here concerns the shifts produced by moving labouring activity from one paradigm of relation to another, and what role the denomination 'work' plays in this context. Chakrabarty suggests that in tactical terms, it is key for the subaltern to speak the language of the 'middle term' (in this instance 'work') in their negotiations and fights with bureaucracy and governmentality: rejecting all labour-based politics often results in no more than a romanticization of work that leads to a loss of rights. Indeed care and creativity are often operators of such romanticization and capture. Equally, the term 'work' serves to undo invisible ties of dependency and shift activity into the sphere of civil concern, rights and publicness, thus opening to the possibility of collective struggle. A politics that neither disavows nor overestimates the power of the term 'work' in contemporary contexts needs to be able to move and translate back and forth between different notions, claims and modes of work.

²¹ Chakrabarty, D. (2007). Provincializing Europe : postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton, N. J. ; Oxford, Princeton University Press, p.85

²² See for instance Deleuze, G., F. I. Guattari, et al. (1988). A thousand plateaus : capitalism and schizophrenia. London, Continuum. ; Graeber, D. (2011). Debt : the first 5,000 years. New York, Melville House.

‘Beyond the generality of labour’ – Dipesh Chakrabarty, Karl Marx

While most post-operaist theory focuses on service-related labour, and thus has the wage and capitalist structuring of labour at its center, much feminist theory pursues theorizations of care beyond the service industry and towards the domestic and informal sphere.²³ This has led to conceptualizations of ‘caring labour’ that aim to move beyond the paradigms of abstract labour and the formal wage, in order to propose alterations of the very economic theories that underlie them. Those feminist economics ground much of my own arguments around informal economies and practices here – see the next chapter.

Creative and caring activity resist easy subsumption under the label of abstract labour in the way we traditionally conceive of them. Their measurement and valorization in a primarily monetary form and organization according to markets (via service-based industry and policy) jars with common ideas of what it means to care and be creative. This is not because of a precious essence of caring and creative activity, but because of their position at the current historical conjuncture of privatisation and precarization in neoliberal societies: other forms of life and labour were just as precious before they became subject to processes of primitive accumulation and wageification. Let me contextualise this by quoting again from Dipesh Chakrabarty, as a way of opening onto a critique of Marxist conceptions of work. Chakrabarty recaps the difference between Marx’s ‘abstract’ labour and Marx’s ‘real’ labour like this:

Real labour’ refers to the labour-power of the actual individual, labour power ‘as it exists in the personality of the labourer’ – that is, as it exists in the ‘immediate exclusive individuality’ of the individual. Just as personalities differ, similarly the labour power of one individual is different from that of another. ‘Real labour’ refers to the essential heterogeneity of individual capacities. ‘Abstract’ or general labour, on the other hand, refers to the idea of uniform, homogeneous labour that capitalism imposes on this heterogeneity, the notion of a general labour that underlies ‘exchange value.’²⁴

²³ See for example the work of Italian Feminists of and beyond the 70s, such as MariaRosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Leopoldina Fortunati, Alisa Del Re. Or in turn see contemporary debates around care as in the *Multitudes Special* (2009) ‘Politiques du Care’. *Multitudes*, 37/38, or in Molinier, P., Laugier, S. and Paperman, P. (eds.) (2009): *Qu’est-ce que le care?* Paris: Editions Payot et Rivages.

²⁴ Chakrabarty, D. (2007). *Provincializing Europe*. Footnote 39.

Chakrabarty proposes a reading of Marx's theory of abstract labour that works towards an analysis of the notion of difference in his concept of capital. Chakrabarty aims to address the rather broad question of whether everything can, will be or already has been subsumed under the logic of capital. Recognizing that capital is a logical framework that can be extended towards a universal concept, Chakrabarty points out that this concept always puts a logic of difference to work. If the formalization of previously self-organized activity as anonymous units of human body-power applicable to machinery, tools and other anonymous human bodies can be characterized as subsumption by capital, and if that process can be observed in different places and forms across the globe since the industrial revolution, this does not mean, however, that the logic of capital is in the process of automatically subjecting everything to its homogenizing force. The 'common' is wider and deeper than we think, though its subsumption is not to be underestimated. Thus, not all labour becomes 'abstract' in the sense of being subject to exchange, thus waged and formalized as work – on the contrary, other forms of 'working' persist, both in subordination to and autonomous from capital.

Capital, work, valorization: necessary differentiations

Chakrabarty takes care to point out that while it would be naïve to assume there is a safe zone beyond capitalism, it would equally be too short-sighted an assumption to pretend that capital is an all-encompassing historical force which will eventually – and homogeneously across space and time – subsume all activity. This is a critique of the 'underdevelopment thesis' that is often applied to 'developing countries', implying a teleological move that sees capitalism as the only possible historical dynamic and as harbinger of 'progress'. The problem of such a view is not only that it is used to legitimize neoliberal structural adjustment measures in poor countries, but also that it produces a politics that can account for difference only insofar as difference is understood to be transitory, tending towards homogeneity. The homogenizing logic of capital is permanently countered by forces of the multitudinous common, as work that's irreducible to exchange value (producing use values that are singular).

The persistence of different modes of valorization operate an internal resistance to capital – giving rise to tendencies that demand that more work be framed as abstract, exchangeable labour (waged, made contractual, put under the aegis and regulation of the state, assigned rights and restrictions) as well as to tendencies that invent forms of

organizing use-value producing activity that sits outside market and state (being ‘work’ only in the sense that it enables reproduction or subsistence, not formally). To speak of work is thus always to speak one or the other language of valorization, to affirm one or the other world, and as such this discursive question is an eminently political and performative one. How to navigate between protecting and affirming the demands of formal workers’ struggles while at the same time affirming the right to self-reproduction and subsistence? The word ‘work’ goes fuzzy in the mouth when caught between such instances.

I will be referring to two fundamental modes of resistance to capital – resistance to its politics of wage slavery and economic and social policies, and as the building and maintaining of alternative worlds and modes of life that ground such struggle. My accounts in this thesis constantly move between those. Resistance internal to capital and the state means demands for wages, for work, the experimentation with other modes of inhabiting scenes of work, protesting exploitation or practising refusal. These modes of resistance address themselves to state and market. They are key for improving conditions for the people working in and around more formal sectors of work, so-called ‘industries’ of all sorts (which account for 50% or less of labour in most countries, see next chapter). Such struggle serves to preserve and extend rights.

What we could call resistance by invention and care proceeds by attempting to invent modes of sustaining life that don’t depend so much on state or market. Practices like growing one’s own food, producing one’s own means of living, squatting or building one’s own houses, inventing modes of barter that allow for exchanging one’s products within a more or less local network, forms of mutual aid and support networks.

While orthodox Marxism and Anarchism remain strictly wedded to the former and latter mode of resistance respectively, feminists and autonomist Marxists mostly manage to speak across the two. After all, the distinctions between formal/waged work and reproductive/subsistence work aren’t clear-cut at all, being rather fluid and relative. Between these two ways of relating to capital are billions of strategies and initiatives, blissfully and rightly unaware of political-subcultural debates. While I will be speaking much of social movements and navigating a field that undeniably has its strong subcultural aspects here, it is in this in-between that I am most interested: co-operative

movements that try to find ways of inscribing differential organizational practice within state and market, organized networks that experiment with other modes of exchanging, sharing and inhabiting. The question of work is in some sense fundamental to those approaches, as ways of relating work structures to different kinds of politics.

Valorization operates across different levels in any kind of work, and can give rise to many forms of resistance – which are not exclusive to each other – combining collective struggle, invention and refusal. Narratives of homogenization often deny the various modes of resistance operating in the present while romanticizing past or remote times. However a methodology of careful listening can open onto other and new models of valorization and organization of work.

Before and beyond the wage

It is such listening that Ivan Illich seems to have engaged with when, in an essay on ‘shadow work’, he speaks of the historicity of the perspective of labour as formally waged. He writes:

Both ‘work’ and ‘job’ are key words today. Neither had its present prominence three hundred years ago. Both are still untranslatable from European languages into many others. Most languages have never had one single word to designate all activities that are considered useful.²⁵

This is not a mere philological exercise – Illich is investigating the subjectivity whose life is oriented around work, and whose conception of work exclusively concerns wage labour. It is only with capitalist industrialisation that wage-labour became the dominant signified of ‘work’, in excluding the invisible labours sustaining the new working masses, done by women in the home and elsewhere, unpaid and full-time, not recognized as ‘work’. The generalization of the wage form may well be a key feature of what we call ‘capitalism’, and the difficulty in imagining how other referents might fit within this system speaks of its great extension today. Before industrialization, working was more commonly a matter of subsistence, with sexual divisions less rigid in most peasant contexts²⁶ – ‘work’ being what it takes to sustain life, whether organising,

²⁵ Illich, I. (1981). *Shadow work*. Boston, Mass. ; London, Open Forum / Boyars. p.101

²⁶ Of course this is a rather broad claim that does not apply to all ages, contexts or instances. For a historical-political investigation into the role of women during the time of the witchhunts, see for instance Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the witch*. New York, Autonomedia ; [London : Pluto, distributor].

producing, preparing, sharing or exchanging things. This meaning has been lost largely due to the economic theories of the 17th and 18th centuries, Illich argues, conceptualizations that focus on wage labour exclusively.

The reason for this blindness to other modes of valorization is an ideological-hegemonic one. The pegging a bulk of activity to a unitary term that enables it to become transactional, just like money, is a move necessary for the establishing of capitalist relations. Illich points to this generalizing function through a 20th century Indonesian example:

For the last three decades, the Ministry for Language Development in Djakarta tried to impose the one term ‘bekerdja’ in lieu of half a dozen others used to designate productive jobs. Sukarno [Indonesian President 1945-67] had considered this monopoly of one term a necessary step for creating a working class.²⁷

This is the dilemma of speaking of work today: we may try to speak of work to call into being a working class which can then claim its rights, yet there are so many forms of work that can not be called into this sphere of rights and wages in the current system. Capitalism will not have everyone in society on a wage: rather it depends on having a majority of the population labour for free, in homes but also in unpaid activities in institutions and communities.

Those non-waged forms of work cannot be analyzed with the same tools as waged labour since their contexts and configurations fundamentally differ. The application of a wage logic to unpaid work appears unambiguous only in contexts where a contractual relation of work is disguised as a learning experience (internships) or employability enhancement (workfare), or in relations of employment that don’t pay for full hours worked (as with much domestic or creative work for instance – but here we are already in the sphere of ‘better pay’).

If capitalism hinges on the wage form, then this category is surely an important analytical tool for imagining other organisations and valorizations of work. Yet in order

²⁷ Illich, I. (1981). *Shadow work*. p.101

to get to visions of social and economic organisation and change that exceed the monodimensionality of capitalism, a rethinking of work is required. Illich as much as Alisa del Re takes up this critique of classical economists as well as Marxists. Affirming the importance of developing workable notions of reproduction and subsistence, Alisa Del Re points to a key fallacy in Marx's description of Capital: 'When Marx says 'the reproduction of labour power' and thus of the person who embodies labour power, never does he say or even think that there might be a distinction, in reproduction, between the workers and those who reproduce him. Although they are two different people, Marx always speaks of them as if they were the same person.'²⁸

Women and other subaltern people don't feature prominently in classical economic or orthodox Marxist visions. In dwelling on these subject positions in his book on shadow work – in ways that were going to get him into some arguments and later dialogues with feminists like Ulrike Von Werlhof – Illich argues that it is not by affirming abstract labour but rather by encouraging subsistence that people will become more autonomous in their working activity. For Illich, here, subsistence means the making of one's own realm of production, exchange and consumption, of mutual aid and care, not the regimented provision of means by one member of a family or clan. In tune with more explicitly feminist arguments, his affirmation of the relation between shadow work and subsistence touches on the question of reproduction in many ways.

'Shadow work' – Ivan Illich

Illich's threefold understanding of modes of labouring – subsistence labour, abstract/wage work, shadow work – appears useful for trying to understand contemporary dynamics not just from the point of view of abstract versus real labour (caught in an imaginary of inside versus outside that doesn't do justice to the complexity of 'work' today). To the concept of abstract, waged labour, Illich adds the concept of 'shadow work', by which he refers to the sphere of unpaid activity that sustains and reproduces the scene of waged labour. This shadow hosts invisible reproductive labour as well as work that happens on the margins of the service and third sectors. I would argue that if we want to extend this concept, we should understand this shadow to also include activity that is formally part of industries while being unpaid, such as voluntary or vocational labour, internships, manufactured social care and

²⁸ Re, A. D. (2008). *Lavoro di Riproduzione*. In: *Lessico Marxiano*. Roma: Manifesto Libri. p.110
Translation from Italian by Arianna Bove.

cooperation.

In the context of welfare dismantling, this shadow seems to be expanding and darkening. Throughout history, we are seeing a reshuffle in the populations of this dark side of labour: slaves and women having been predominant in this invisible support sphere of capitalism, now some women and migrants can step in front of the headlights of the labour market, while others are still being differentially pushed back into the shadows. Skill and citizenship are selection criteria when it comes to who's in and out of the shadows, but maternity and (dis)ability too increasingly serve to differentiate who can step out of the shadows and who cannot. In this way, unpaid shadow work has always been instrumental to capital, as a counterpoint to wage labour that allows for the employed to be set up against the unemployed, men against women, citizens against migrants, and so on. Yet it should be clear that abstract labour, shadow work and subsistence work co-exist in the lives of many people: the separations that these categories describe do not necessarily correspond to everyday practices.

'Subsistence' – Ivan Illich, Alisa del Re

Let me return to Illich's insistence on subsistence as the production of use-value independently of both market and state (sometimes called 'work', sometimes not). Akin to commoning, it is clear that subsistence implies resistance to the categorizations and dependencies set up by state and market, in an attempt at building bridges across and beyond the worlds of shadow work. Such building of autonomous infrastructures and circuits of support is transhistorical. Pre-industrial organization of work in and around the home and the exchanging of self-made goods via local networks are examples of subsistence activities that go back a long way. As capital and state root out subsistence forms country after country, leaving only tatters of self-sustaining safety nets (so as to save on welfare spending), resistance takes forms as diverse as agricultural cooperatives, land squatting, urban agriculture, guerrilla gardening, local trade and exchange networks, free shops, community clinics, DIY spaces, mutual aid systems, marriages for papers, new forms of family networks, etc. In the face of such commoning, imagining new forms of subsistence must also entail broader distributive proposals such as a basic income, argues Alisa del Re. Subsistence here means more than mere survival, rather concerning the capacity to reproduce oneself as average

member of a given society.²⁹

Life and work

The reality of what most people may call their ‘life’ today - speaking biographically, possibly in careerist terms - is a mixture of different modalities of work, making the distinction between work and life complicated and fragile. We may have learned to speak of our life in terms of a linear succession of jobs interspersed with a few familial events, yet we have not yet come to terms with speaking of work as if it coincided with our everyday relations, with all our makings and doings. Yet art and care come very close to an understanding of ‘work’ that becomes life, or gives life, in vital terms. While creative labour is a paradigmatic example of a life that becomes work via the structuring of all time into projects and of all relations into collaborations, this understanding of work-life still seems problematic to most people. As a young woman I interviewed during the mentioned London-based arts event said of her relation to work and time:

YOUNG WOMAN: So I basically like have a part time job which I do three days a week, and that's been pretty constant, but because I'm doing my finals for my degrees, that's dropping off, and my unpaid work is definitely rising... so it is been, probably, I guess it is just below half my time, because with art you tend to... you know that's [points to her part time job] nine to five - I know when I can leave - whereas with art, you end up thinking about it at two in the morning... [...] I'm a sculptor, and I'm just finishing my BA, and then I'm going to the royal college to continue ... for the last few years, I've been doing my studies part time, it is been very much like...

INTERVIEWERS: Juggling eh?

YW: Juggling yeah... and yeah, that's been quite constant. so I haven't been able to devote more time to one than the other. [part time work and art]... it is been very even, but I don't think that's necessarily a good way to be... cause you're constantly in flux and... at least if you know that one is the means to and end for the other, you can maybe put less effort into it... but at the moment they're too even, so it is quite stressful really... [...] yeah I mean, I can't really complain, though I do... but you know it is realistic... everyone has to work to survive and

²⁹ In her text on Reproduction, Del Re argues for a complex basic income as ‘subsistence income’, as calculated based on what’s needed to reproduce oneself in a given society at a given historical moment (she points out that one of the big errors of real socialism was to assume that such a median subsistence requirement was translocal and transhistorical, fixing it once and for all).

they're very lucky if they get to work, do something they love and getting paid for it, I think.

I: Then another question... would you want your work to be paid in terms of the amount of time that you spend on it, or when you move your practice into the paid realm, do you still think you'd sell a piece, you get commissioned and get paid for it?

YW: Yeah it is difficult 'cause the stone sculpture I did took me 150 hours, roughly, so there's no way that I could ever... if I was doing this on some kind of hourly rate, no one would buy it for that money, so that's not even an option... but you do think more in those terms when you're working in the paid world... cause you're kind of going 'this would have been X, I would have earned this much'...

I: Yeah, the problem of wage, thinking about a wage for the arts...

YW: Yeah but you know the kind of pleasure, there's no way I would have stayed at work [her waged job] until one o'clock in the morning, whereas I can sit there and do 16 hours [talking about arts]... and so it is... there is more pleasure involved, it is not all work...³⁰

Where we draw the line between work and life, we are performing the abstraction that allows capitalism to function the way it does. Working, out of work; at work, at home; productive, unproductive; productive, reproductive – these conceptual pairs are the building blocks of a subjectivity that cannot look beyond work as waged, and thus not move beyond a way of life that is based in abstraction.

Yet we need to differentiate between the two in the world of capitalism. Life, the autopoietic interplay between body and soul as we might say with Bifo,³¹ depends on more than material support, it also needs workable meanings to keep going. These meanings are what distinguish a life in its singularity from what Agamben calls 'bare life' (a massified and abstract *Zoë*, the body reduced to its physical attributes) and from what Peter Pelbart calls 'plain life' (the body as bioascetic, voluntarily normative).³² Passion and love are key aspects of what ties us to life, and in the case of arts as well as

³⁰ Interview based on the future mapping method, conducted by Mara Ferreri at the Market of Ideas event at Chelsea College of Art, 23rd May 2010. I recorded this conversation.

³¹ Berardi, F. (2009). *The soul at work : from alienation to autonomy*. Los Angeles, CA, Semiotext(e).

³² Pelbart, P. P. (2008), *bare life, plain life, a life*, in: *Vocabularies*.

care they are often a driving force for doing unpaid labour.³³

In asking how caring and creative activity are organized across and in between the formal and informal, paid and unpaid, self-organized and externally managed, I aim to understand by what means and subjective shifts activities of labouring resist or escape logics of capital. This means questioning when and how it is that situated instances of care and creativity take on a meaning and force of their own through acts of collective organization. I look towards the way self-organizations of care and creativity operate at the edge of our ideas about what constitutes work, and how their self-organisation points to other practices of investment and refusal of work.

Third-person based definitions of ‘work’

Another common definition of ‘work’ consists in its delimitation as an activity wherein a worker is replaceable, an activity that another person can take over: something that lies between the singular moments of individual creativity or of relational communication or care, something that can be defined as a task to be taken over by a third person. Neither creative labour nor care work easily fit into third-person based definitions of what constitutes work. While washing dishes, making beds, teaching gymnastics, changing the font on a design, cooking, hanging paintings, changing nappies and so on can be transferred as tasks, it is questionable to what extent activities that involve a particular personal investment and intimacy can be easily transferrable. Caring for a child, soothing a sick patient, facilitating a project, making a painting – all these hinge on networks of relations and knowledges that situate the worker in a somewhat singular place. In such instances, the transferral of ‘work’ to a person outside this field of relations often implies a loss of quality, of singularity, of trust or intimacy. To be sure, intimacy and singularity too pass through gestures and repeatable chores, they are not detached from ‘work’: it is merely a disposition we are talking about, not a practice.³⁴ Yet what characterizes non-alienated care and creativity is that they exist within strong and irreplaceable webs of relation and understanding, not as mere tasks in impersonal service economies.

³³ As one website puts it: ‘Expressing your creativity is living your passion, being an artist in all areas of life and making your whole *life* a *work of art*—even your *work*’ Naiman, L. (2011) *Life as a work of art*. Blog post.

³⁴ See Tronto, J. C. (1994). *Moral boundaries : a political argument for an ethic of care*. New York ; London, Routledge.

‘Autoregulated and heteroregulated work’ - André Gorz

André Gorz has much to bring to the debate about the meaning and purpose of work, its organisation and autonomy. He distinguishes between autonomously and heteronomously organised work, and to him it is clear that ‘The kind of collaboration and integration that happen in the sphere of heteronomy radically differ from the cooperation and integration of members of a group or a workers community.’³⁵ Heteronomously determined cooperation does not stop with Taylorism but may be seen to carry on even into neo-communitarian programmes such as the Big Society. In drawing on Sartre and Habermas, Gorz points to the way in which self-organised work is based in collective action of groups, wherein workers follow and share intentions – unlike in heteronomously determined cooperation (such as the factory or subordinate ‘teams’ in service industries), actions are only functionally coordinated rather than being determined by workers themselves.

The linking of work with intention appears radical and daring in the face of contemporary forms of work control and evaluation, where even the smallest gestures are scripted³⁶ and any digression from protocol is recorded and results (more or less directly) in penalties. On the other hand, the link between work and intention is permanently emphasised in post-Fordist scenes of production, with workers having to demonstrate motivation, dedication and investment, asked to come to ‘own’ their job, to feel at home in their team, to perform belonging, determination and the identification with work. The distinction between ‘manufactured’ environments of cooperation and self-initiated and -run ones is not always easy to make, but its formulation across contexts is crucial.

Gorz also points to the fact that there are different ways of heteronomously controlling work. He distinguishes between two types of heteroregulation, one being the ‘totalisation of serialised actions, those that no one wanted, foresaw, thought of within the material context they are inscribed in; and heteroregulation based in an organised programming, in an elaborate organisational chart that is meant to make people who are unable to get on or communicate into the objects of collective action that they often

³⁵ Gorz, A. (1988) *Métamorphoses du travail*. Paris: Folio. p.61. My translation from French.

³⁶ For a case study based in waitressing work, see Dowling, E. (2012) *The Waitress – On Affect, Method and (Re)Presentation*. In: *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* April 2012, Vol.12, No.2. pp.109-117

don't intend nor even perceive themselves.'³⁷ Industrial control falls within the first category, while manufactured civil society falls within the second³⁸ - as such the former tends to be associated with market heteroregulation, the latter with the state. Since the two are integrated into one another in the managerialisms that underpin the post-Fordist paradigm, the experience of such work is rather often a profound feeling of ambivalence and discomfort.

Contemporary ambivalences of work

Contemporary working practices that sit between intimacy and abstraction are as such often characterized as ambivalent. Ambivalence has been theorised in this sense by Paolo Virno³⁹ as an emergent feature of post-Fordist work. Virno speaks of an 'immediate coincidence between production and ethics, structure and superstructure, between the revolution of labor processes and the revolution of sentiments, between technology and emotional tonality, between material development and culture.'⁴⁰ Today, ambivalence is frequently referred to not just in analyses of post-Fordism but also of caring labour and particularly global care chains (as we shall see in section B). Recent capitalist developments operate complex and two-way shifts between invisible, unpaid work and wage labour, opening new subjective rifts and formations.

Looking at it from the side of wage labour, one may attest an 'end of the society of work' (Virno) – perhaps lamenting it, perhaps not – and say that 'The direct expenditure of labor has become a marginal production factor, a 'miserable residue'. To the words of a tormented Marx for whom work 'steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor',⁴¹ we might add that work also decomposes: becomes voluntarist, becomes flexible, becomes precarious, becomes feminine as some say. Coming at it from the viewpoint of informal care or creative labour, we look to narratives of primitive accumulation to understand some aspects of care-becoming-service, arts-becoming-industry, and to feminist analyses for an understanding of the stakes in demanding wages and economic recognition.

³⁷ Gorz, A. (1988) *Métamorphoses du travail*. p.62. My translation from French.

³⁸ See Hodgson, L. (2004). *Manufactured Civil Society*.

³⁹ See Virno, Paolo (1994), *The ambivalence of disenchantment*, in: Virno, P. and M. Hardt (1996). *Radical thought in Italy : a potential politics*. Minneapolis, Minn.; London, University of Minnesota Press.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.14

⁴¹ Ibid, p.18,9

Intimacy, engagement and cooperation come to play complex roles in contemporary semi-formal employment relations, whether it is in the context of precarious creative industry collaboration or nannying work. Both the workplace and the home have become sites of blurrings between market and private life in the neoliberal context: many have set out to analyse the relational and emotional tensions of such work-life.⁴² Another aspect of ambivalence concerns ‘tensions between work enhancement and work reduction’, as Emiliana Armano puts it in a study that emphasizes ‘ambivalence as a typical feature of post-Fordism’.⁴³ As the young art worker quoted above says, ‘at least if you know that one is the means to and end for the other, you can maybe put less effort into it...’.⁴⁴ With post-Fordist work as with caring labour, it is hard to reduce work, to set up boundaries.

As such, the Creative Industries policies that have sprung up in many European countries around the 2000s (from national and city branding policies and industry developing schemes to European capitals of culture, culture-based neighbourhood regeneration, white nights, etc.)⁴⁵ did not just have the effect of structuring and controlling a blurry sphere of productivity, commercializing and privatizing its production. They installed and enforced a new entrepreneurial and competitive culture, destructuring work into loops of applying for jobs, educating and training oneself, networking, migrating, keeping attractive and fit, doing jobs, working on projects, etc.

The various ‘migrations’ that occur across the geographies and modes of contemporary production produce different forms of ambivalence and uprootedness: the question of how to define work is often at their center. Where does work begin and end? As Emilia

⁴² On care work, see for instance: Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life : notes from home and work*. Berkeley, University of California Press. ; *Multitudes Special* (2009) *Politiques du Care* ; Pratt, G. (2004). *Working feminism*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press. ; Lutz, H. (2011). *The new maids*.

On creative work, see for instance: The ambivalence of disenchantment, in: Lotringer, S. r. and C. Marazzi (2008). *Autonomia : post-political politics*. Cambridge, Mass ; London, Semiotext(e). ; the work of Franco Berardi ; and also Shannon Holopainen (2008), *Against Net-working*, published on nonspecialist.net (Blog no longer exists).

⁴³ See Armano, E. (2011) *Notes on Some Features of Knowledge Work* in Birke, P. & Henninger, M. (eds) *Sozial Geschichte Online* (6/2011). Translated by Bove, A., Brookes, J., Cuninghame, P., Henninger, M., Stubbe, L. and Wright, S..

⁴⁴ Interview based on the future mapping method, conducted by Mara Ferreri at the Market of Ideas event at Chelsea College of Art, 23rd May 2010.

⁴⁵ For a reiteration of the European Creative Industries Agenda, see also European Commission (2013) *Culture and Creative Industries*. Webpage.

Armano points out, ‘the current coordinates of class composition can only be determined upon the basis of the problems posed by this new and complex situation’⁴⁶ - the question of organisation hinges substantially upon how we think about work.

Boundary work – Helma Lutz, Pei-Chia Lan

How can we see the labour of drawing and re-drawing boundaries in both a creative and caring perspective, to understand contemporary associational processes in a new light, beyond a conservative affirmation of waged work or a romanticisation of housework, as well as beyond a naïve affirmation of flexibility and nomadism? It is useful to look at the very concrete instances of boundary-setting processes that occur in different contexts. Helma Lutz, in a study of migrant domestic workers’ experiences, refers to the term ‘boundary work’ as coined by Pei-Chia Lan,

[...] as a theoretical tool to analyse the interactive dynamics of reproducing, contesting and negotiating processes of social inequality in the household. She describes the interplay of two sets of social boundary-setting mechanisms; on the one hand, socio-categorical boundaries established by means of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality, and on the other hand, the socio-spatial boundaries within the private sphere which serve to demarcate the boundaries between domesticity and privacy. [...] Although this boundary-setting takes place on both sides, it need not necessarily be complementary. Employers and employees resort to their own different strategies and employ different criteria for demarcating their separate spaces.⁴⁷

Just as the nanny’s or cleaner’s work in another person’s home is marked by a struggle for autonomy as well as intimacy, by a host of double bound feelings and desires, so is the work of many in the creative industries, when they network and lobby with their acquaintances or silently compete with friends over funding. Those scenes of flexible work and domestic life are very entangled, with positive and negative effects. Trust, self-organisation and solidarity need to take new shapes in those contexts.

Wageless life – Michael Denning

‘Informal’ is a common term denoting work and economies that can be of both the paid and unpaid type – term increasingly used in development reports and NGO discourse.

⁴⁶ Armano, E. (2011) *Notes on Some Features of Knowledge Work*.

⁴⁷ Lutz, H. (2011). *The new maids*. p.94

Such informal labour – which sometimes is not even considered labour, but just everyday activity – goes by many different names, depending on which type one speaks of. Across the formal/informal spectrum there are many modes of making a living. The definition of ‘informal’ labour itself is historically specific, Michael Denning⁴⁸ points out in a text on ‘wageless life’ that speaks of the historical and geographic occurrences of notions of unemployment and informal work.

Whilst unemployment emerges in the late 19th century, as an experiment in counting those outside of waged work that slowly transforms into common practice, serving the administration of populations in and out of work and contributing to economic regulation particularly in times of capitalist crisis. This corresponds to the emergence of social democracy and its management of populations. The ‘informal’ sector or economy is a term that Denning traces back Marx’s ‘Lumpenproletariat’ and to the notion of ‘reserve labour force’, taken up by Fanon in a post/colonial context as ‘wretched of the earth’ – knowledge production and discourses around informal economies initially limited themselves to ‘underdeveloped’ countries (where wageless work accounts for well over 50% of economic activity) and only recently been applied to industrialised countries.

The phrase that came to dominate official discourse—the ‘informal sector’—was coined in the early 1970s by a British development economist, Keith Hart, who was studying the communities of Frafra migrants from northern Ghana living in the Nima shanty town on the northern outskirts of the old city of Accra. ‘A very large part of the urban labour force is not touched by wage employment’, Hart wrote. He went on to outline the forms of ‘self-employment’ that made up the means of livelihood of Nima slum-dwellers: ‘the distinction between formal and informal income opportunities is based essentially on that between wage-earning and self-employment.’⁴⁹

Current positions on ‘informal economies’ – where they refer to monetary economies outside the formal wage form, which as such do not include reproductive work or subsistence – range from affirmation to rejection:

Neoliberal critics of state regulation have tended to celebrate the entrepreneurial

⁴⁸ Denning, M. (2010) *Wageless Life*. In: *New Left Review*, Issue 66, Autumn 2010.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.89

gusto of the informal sector, its micro-enterprises that need only micro-credit to thrive. Defenders of social democratic welfare states have advocated the formalization of the informal: the extension of social protections and representation in unions.⁵⁰

As Denning points out, another turn of vocabulary suggests that it is indeed self-employment that's at stake in work frequently referred to as 'informal' (referring to money-reaping work happening in the street and home notably, such as street vending, garbage picking and home-based production): the Self-Employed Women's Association in India (SEWA) affirms this identification. Indeed struggles around such work might not turn to the formal wage form but rather demand more legality, space and security – the wage is hardly the end-all aspiration in matters of making a living.

This raises the question not just of how attached to the wage we really are, but also whether the concept of work really has that much binding power in a context where paradigms of production and population management are shifting, and where crisis policies clearly expel more and more people from formal wage relations (capital attracts and repels labour force, making for more or less big reserve armies, as Marx says). What affirmation of dignified ways of 'making a living' lie beyond the wage and the rhetorics of work in our current context? And beyond informal employment, how to give account of reproductive work too and imagine its place in a desirable society?

Labour: an end in itself? The current crisis and work

A 1999 text of the German 'Krisis' collective, entitled 'Manifesto against Labour', argues that it is urgent to find an alternative to labour-centered narratives, and as such resonates much with the current crisis context:

Never before was society as much a labour society as it is now, when labour itself is made superfluous. [...] The globally evident fact that labour proves to be a self-destructive end-in-itself is stubbornly redefined into the individual or collective failure of individuals, companies, or even entire regions as if the world is under the control of a universal *idée fixe*. The objective structural barrier of labour has to appear as the subjective problem of those who are

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.90

already ousted.⁵¹

Those who are already ousted: the people and groups working in the shadows – unpaid or semi-paid, unemployed, on workfare, in training or illegalized – are constantly encouraged to see work as the ultimate end to aspire to, to fight for. Whether they actually aspire to wage labour is a contentious question.

The predominance of labour as a supposed end in itself is paradoxical not just in the face of technological development, ‘the micro-electronic revolution’ in the wake of which ‘wealth production increasingly became independent from the actual expenditure of human labour power to an extent quite recently only imaginable in science fiction.’⁵² It is paradoxical particularly in current crises of work and reproduction, caused by this massive gap between economics and work, between a growing proletariat and financial-political elites, that the reinvention of subsistence activities and communal modes of reproduction that avoid capitalist wages and indeed make it possible to imagine work as autonomous and as an end in itself. Unemployed people in Greece organising their own food distribution systems and communal healthcare; evicted Spaniards occupying villages and forming Cooperatives; the expansion of the Italian Network of solidarity-based Shopping⁵³ – the south and periphery of Europe, at least, are in a moment of revolt and transformation.

Much can be learned from non-industrialised countries about other approaches to work, of course – not least in relation to how to avoid the charity cultures that impinge upon weak economies and communities. The ‘electronic intifada’ platform quotes a Palestinian woman who recently started her own rooftop garden, in order to be more independent from aid and provide her family more food security: “I feel more empowered,” said Ramadan. “I grow something and I eat from my work. I’m contributing to my family and that’s a good feeling.”⁵⁴ Similar approaches to autonomy are emerging from austerity-ridden Europe, where crisis ‘rescue plans’ threaten to bring about similar regimes of dependency on aid and enslavement to debt repayment on an international as well as private scale.

⁵¹ Krisis-Group (1999) *Manifesto against labour*.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gruppi d’Acquisto Solidale Website.

⁵⁴ Kestler-D’Amours, J. (2012) *Rooftop gardens project aims to reduce refugees’ dependence on aid*. [Electronic Intifada Blog](#).

Crisis neoliberalism adapts its policies to extend accumulation outside the sphere of waged labour: beyond housewives and paperless migrants, now those wanting to access any kind of welfare have to work for free: workfare⁵⁵. No matter how capital's distributory mechanisms shift however, it is clear that it needs both waged and free labour, as I explore further in the next chapter.

This chapter has asked the questions 'how to speak about work, what does it mean to speak about work, what does it matter who speaks of work' in referring to a set of voices – of workers, theorists, work-theorists, theoretical workers, workers-as-theorists, theorists-of-work, and so forth. These utterances are tied to specific bodies in specific places and times, and interconnected in a big and uneven transhistorical 'conversation' marked by struggle. As much as this chapter has had a character of cacophony, it corresponds to the diversity of what 'work' means in our worlds. In the face of the various struggles concerning its definitions and forms, we appear to arrive at the impossibility of setting out an abstract, ever-valid definition of this sphere of activity – not to mention an objective claim about how this activity should be organised or valorised. Rather we have begun to hear some of the situated and singular moments of struggle and strategic and tactical positions these voices speak from. The focus here, according to that of this study, has been on activities that may be called creative and caring.

Having explored these vocabularies, contexts and imaginaries around the notion of 'work', from viewpoints both subjective and analytical, we now look at the broader picture around work, in relation to economics. The following chapter questions the capitalist and androcentric model of economics from the specific viewpoint of women's experience (as well as raising questions of subaltern experience more broadly). Capitalism here means a logic based on the production of surplus value, strongly informing our economic system and relations within it. Androcentrism is a way of seeing the world as based on the experiences of those historically and socially identified as males. We will be approaching this matter from the back door, in looking at what is not visible.

⁵⁵ Workfare policies have been pioneered in the UK, but are extending in the context of European austerity governance. A UK Platform resisting this forced labour is the 'Boycott Workfare' Campaign, London.

A.2 Definitional struggles and feminist viewpoints: work and economics

At one and the same time, there is the necessity (taking the example of domestic work) of rethinking the concept of work from its foundations in order to come to a new 'formal definition' that doesn't conform itself with the apparent use that we attribute to it today.

Doesn't the majority of contemporary work suffer the same condition? When we say 'work' today we refer less to a concrete portion of time that we carry out outside of the home, a task that starts and ends with an act that is individualized and certified as such.

Rather we think of an extended mechanism, which is often carry out between the walls of our home and which implies putting into play relations and exchanges that belong to the existence of the subject outside of work, to its affective life, to its interests, passions, knowledges and experiences.¹

Feminist economics: the value of informal work

Feminist economics is an emergent discipline that critically takes on mainstream economics, from the viewpoint of unpaid work and gender notably. The field is a broad one, as Kaethe, a feminist economist and member of the Viennese Prekaer Café, put it in an interview:

Feminist economics is not a unitary field. There are different political standpoints, which also question what 'feminism' is, since there are many feminisms; and economics is a broad-spectrum term too – from Keynesian to

¹ Morini, C. (2010). *El trabajo de cuidado como arquetipo del biocapitalismo*. In: Swarm Webjournal.

Marxist, from radical to reformist, and neoliberal – depending on whose interests are at stake and what theories they build on. So those [economics] can be combined with different feminisms, making for a huge diversity. What they all have in common is that they're not the mainstream, opening small niches for other perspectives, however as a growing field. Care, caring labour [Sorgearbeit, Pflegearbeit] and the entire unpaid sector have been a central issue in feminist economics since the beginning.²

Feminist economists have variously³ pointed to the shortcomings of understandings of economics as based only in market and state – claiming that such classical economic perspectives perpetuate inequalities running along gender and race lines, remaining strategically blind to the unpaid and informal work that underpins the reproduction of the capitalist system. Feminist economics is based on the premise that unpaid work should be considered in economic definitions and calculations, stressing that value really is created way beyond industries in our societies, and reflecting on how such work might be (re)organized and valued. It denounces the claim that only some work is really productive, that only some work is worth pay, and that economics must limit itself to industry and state in order to get a grip on the organisation of the social, as one that's ideological and exploitative, formulated from a patriarchal point of view. The question of wages and pay is a contentious one in this field too: some affirm the demands for wages for housework, others demand a universal basic income, others yet argue for inclusive forms of community economy and subsistence, etc.

Whatever proposals for reorganisation and remuneration may be at stake, it is nothing less than a complete redefinition of economics that is on the agenda, since to take unpaid and informal work into account in economics means that the sphere considered to pertain to this discipline doubles. A German time budget study for instance estimates that 'the total financial value created by housework [not via wages, obviously] in 2001 is at least 820 billion Euros, which corresponds to the gross value added of German industry, trade, hospitality and transport sectors all together'⁴. When the manifold forms

² Interview-Conversation with Kaethe Knittler and Lisbeth Kovacic from Prekär Café Vienna, for the Sounds of Movement Radio show on 'Care, Feminist Economics and Strikes', April 2013.

³ I am mostly referring to perspectives that also entail a questioning of capitalist relations here, in pointing to writings of J.K Gibson-Graham and Jenny Cameron, Nancy Folbre, Susan Donath, Claudia von Werlhof, Ulrike Knobloch, Luise Gublitzler, Eva Klawatsch-Treitl and Mascha Madoerin.

⁴ Gender Kompetenz Zentrum (2002) *Gender Aspekte Unbezahlte Arbeit*. Web post. My translation from

of unpaid work and non-market exchange stop being reduced to matters of anthropology, sociology and other social sciences, but taken seriously as constitutive elements of the social 'oikos' and its law, many injustices become apparent and plenty of questions and tensions arise. The politics of counting and the power of definition thus become central concerns to economics, the latter being no longer regarded as neutral or objective science but as a terrain of political contestation.

Amongst the many spheres that may be considered from this perspective, the domains of domesticated, home-based, informal, invisible, reproductive and caring work are key, not least since they allow us to map out how a social and economic system like capitalism reproduces itself across time and space. The informal unpaid work of women and subaltern subjects creates the conditions for the formal and monetarised sphere to exist, and its organization is key to the functioning of our economies. This organisation does not happen by chance or 'naturally' but on the basis of power relations, interests and struggles.

In denouncing the great historical cover-up of patriarchal-capitalist economics, feminists are hard pressed to propose alternative ways of envisioning and organising economies. Indeed this is one of the most interesting aspects of this field of study: that it inevitably situates itself within an urgent project of proposing alternatives, beyond mere critique. As all analysis and contestation from below, this way of speaking up to a dominant worldview and system is rooted in struggles for other ways of doing things. Beyond a simple rendering of those invisible economies in monetary terms, what is at stake in this domain of research is other models of economy and thus of policy, wealth creation, distribution and social organisation. As such, feminist economics is strongly allied with postcolonial critiques and intersectional perspectives on subalternity and invisibility.

The politics of counting, the power of definition

Researchers in this field have proposed various ways of conceiving of economic sectors, based on a broader understanding of what contributes to the functionings of industry and society. The model of Luise Gubitzer for instance delineates five key areas of economy: the home, the for-profit sector, the public sector (state), the third sector and

lastly the illegal and criminal sector.⁵ What is counted into ‘economics’, ‘the economy’ or ‘economies’ and what isn’t, how such counting is done, and to what end, is a highly contested issue: at stake is not merely a statistical or sociological questioning but also an epistemological, historical and political proposal of how work and social organisation should be thought and done. On most Marxist-feminist and decolonial accounts of economics it seems clear that if ‘counting in’ merely means subjecting previously unaccountable domains of activity to the capitalist wage logic, little more than new cycles of primitive accumulation and thus exploitation are to be expected.

Economics based on situated realities

Given the complexity of this field, and the various definitional options across the macro- and micro-political dimensions (what counts as work in the economy, in the home, in self-perception), a requirement for researching economies of care is ‘to take life realities and experiences – especially those of women – as [...] point of departure.’⁶ Subjective accounts and experiences of work, similar to those we saw in the previous chapter, are also subjects of feminist economic research, including ‘topics such as family economics, connections, concreteness, and emotion’⁷. The combination of time-budget study⁸ based investigations of everyday life with analyses of subjectivity⁹ and macro-political and –economic perspectives opens complex and more complete insights into the ‘integrated circuits’ (Donna Haraway) of life-work in domestic, feminised and informal work. Most of my investigation draws on more qualitative and experience-based ‘data’ and policy analysis to question economies and politics of care and creativity. However below as well as in chapter C1 I give some space to statistical analysis, as an occasion for illustration as well as critique.

Most of the unpaid, informal work in our societies is done by women. As a Canadian census study of 2006 shows (paralleled by many other country studies showing similar proportions), ‘Women perform 2/3 of the 25 billion hours of unpaid work Canadians

⁵ Gubitzer, L. (2009) *Dritte profitieren*. Online at the Austrian Website Arbeit-Wirtschaft.

⁶ Klawatsch-Treitl Eva (2009), *Care in Babylon – Ueberlegungen zur WIDE-Jahreskonferenz ‘We Care’*, in: *Olympe*, Issue 30 on Care Economics’ My translation from German.

⁷ Wikipedia, Entry on ‘Feminist Economics’, April 2013.

⁸ Time budget studies are ‘diaries’ wherein durations of daily chores are meticulously recorded, notably in relation to home based work, to produce statistics on the temporalities of work and multitasking – a method we also experimented with as the Carrot Workers Collective in relation to unpaid cultural work. For some of the visual manifestations of these graphs, see Carrot Workers Collective/Precarious Workers Brigade (2011) *Counter-guide to free labour*. London: self-published.

⁹ See particularly *Multitudes Special: Politiques du Care*.

perform every year and on average women spend twice as much time (2/3) on unpaid work as on paid work (1/3).¹⁰ In terms of unpaid and unrecognized work, women's reproductive labours in and around the home are chief. Much of the labour in the home is non-negotiable: if it is not done, there is no food, no shopping, no childcare, no hygiene, no washed clothes or dishes, etc. – that is to say, no reproduction of society. Refusal, leave and regular breaks are no option with such work, because it is informal and unregulated, meaning its terms and conditions are subject to private negotiation (traditionally a struggle between male breadwinners and female homemakers, often implying an ample amount of inequality and violence). Sexualised labours (in the home and beyond) are part of this spectrum of work, albeit generally not counted into statistical figures (the assumption being that home-based as much as monetised sexualised relations are based on equality; another manifestation of an androcentric viewpoint on the 'oikos' and its functioning).

When it comes to informal yet paid work, it is subaltern subjects such as people without work permits or with too low an income to afford taxes that share the statistical majority. The politics of measuring and counting in are complex here too: arguments in favour of bringing informal work under the radar of governance often end up 'promoting the transition to a salaried economy' (thus the title of one OECD report on informal paid work) in claiming to protect workers:

“Informal” employment escapes taxation and regulation. Such forms of employment make it difficult to manage social protection; undermine tax collection, implying either high tax rates on those in formal employment or poor-quality government services; involve unfair competition and inefficient production methods; and facilitate illegal migration.¹¹

Whilst arguments for a wageification of informal paid work appear less contentious than arguments for wages for housework, it must be noted that reports such as this one often idealize formal work without analysing the reasons why it is people can't afford to pay taxes on their work (because real wages are increasingly low) or why government services are 'poor' (the same neoliberal dynamic that presses down wages also

¹⁰ For a summary on Canadian figures on unpaid women's work, see: UNPAC (date unknown) *Unpaid work+women* Website.

¹¹ OECD (2004), *Informal Employment and Promoting the Transition to a Salaried Economy*. Report.

dismantles welfare states), ignoring the systemic exploitation that wage regimes imply in times of redistribution towards the top, the neoliberal restructuring of work (and its management) and cuts to welfare and social rights. The OECD is no minor actor when it comes to the interests of the ruling elites, rooted in the ideology of economic growth and global competitiveness.

One key proposal for the governance of the informal sector that's inferred in this OECD report is the enforcement of property rights¹². Indeed the field of cultural production is by nature highly informal (with strong dimensions of barter and collaboration, and high levels of precarity): Creative Industries policies have been designed with the formalisation of work and the enforcement of intellectual property laws in mind. International intellectual property rights enforcement laws such as ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) have recently added to this trend in the digital domain, affecting not just internet file sharing and information liberation, but also informal work such as street vending (making it a criminal offence to sell copied DVDs).

When it comes to formal but underpaid work (low wage labour), cheap migrant and (often part time) women's work are prominent – whether in agriculture, mechanized labour or service sectors. This area shows the key to dismantling arguments that glorify the wage: the capitalist wage, particularly vicious in its neoliberal form, is no tool for liberation. Whether it comes from the OECD or from well-meaning social democrats, it appears clear that an affirmation of formalisation without critical analysis of the real causes and effects of capitalist development amounts to little more than a subsumption of working activity into the regimes of governance. In the current moment of crisis, the only socially beneficial way of dwelling on law enforcement, rights and formalisation is to struggle for social rights and for the prosecution of political, business and financial elites that expropriate the public, speculate with public monies, evade tax, arbitrarily contravene and change laws, and so forth. In the context of increasing class war¹³ in Europe, it is particularly evident that the law is on the side of those in power, unless contested by popular resistance.

¹² Ibid, p.259

¹³ I refer to this strong term to point not just to an increasing social antagonism but notably also to the increasingly fierce modes of accumulation and repression that characterize the European situation, as well as the globally growing gaps in wealth distribution.

The ‘other economy’ and the commons

Shifting divisions and scales of in/visibility, non/remuneration, in/formality and under/payment: the negative forms of those terms are reserved for the subaltern, the undercommons. Stefano Harney defines the undercommons as ‘unacknowledged self-organisation of the despised, discounted, and anti-social’ (from the point of view of capital) or the ‘self-organisation of the incommensurate’¹⁴ (from the revolutionary point of view). Existing at the margins of hegemonic reality (‘real’ work, for instance) and legality, the element of commoning within spheres of subaltern work is a crucial one: networks of support and self-organisation are built in order to sustain the fragile lives of those without a contract, a wage, a fee or even the recognition for doing work. As in some arguments relating to the autonomy of migration (see Chapter B.3), the ‘I would prefer not to’ of evading the formal sphere of work may indeed be seen as rejection of con narratives of stable and well paid jobs (however potentially producing entrepreneurial, neoliberal and networked forms of work ethic, see Chapters A.3 and B.1).

Particularly in relation to unpaid work in and around the home, feminist economists such as Susan Donath say ‘the other economy’ in referring not just to a separate economic but also an ethical sphere, which

[...] functions by gifts and reciprocity rather than by exchange. Individuals in this economy do not maximize utility and profits; instead they act in ways which are consistent with norms, expectations and beliefs, for both their own and those which are exposed by other forces. Folbre, for instance, defines ‘caring labour’ as that which is undertaken out of affection or a sense of responsibility for others, and with no expectation of immediate pecuniary reward.¹⁵

Such feminist economics also question existing economic models in view of how the concepts of self-interest, individualism, autonomy and competitiveness underpin them, and to what extent a different approach to economics may have to deconstruct those. Theories of caring labour do this by focusing on the interdependencies that inevitably exist between people, arguing for an economics that takes those as a point of departure.

¹⁴ Harney, S. (2008) *Governance and the Undercommons*. Interactivist Info Exchange Blog.

¹⁵ Donath, Susan (2000) *The Other Economy: A Suggestion for a Distinctively Feminist Economics* in: *Feminist Economics*, Vol. 6:1, p. 115 – 123.

As Nancy Folbre says, there is a dimension to the organization of survival that is an

[...]intrinsically personal, emotional kind of exchange that requires long-term relationships between people. And, this is not something that the grand theoreticians of capitalism thought about. And, it is not something that the grand theoreticians of socialism thought about either.¹⁶

Folbre thinks that care quality cannot be protected in a market. Like Donath, she argues that making care more efficient (in market terms, which in this case we can take to mean neoliberal ones) merely results in a loss in quality. While service work as such deals with affects in the context of an experience economy, care work mostly disappoints if it stays on the dimension of short-lived affect, since it deals with vulnerability and suffering. While care indeed needs to produce potential, it also involves a significant and sustained labour of paying attention to what does not work, to pain, problems, blockages, and as such it takes time. Care often mediates between life and death, addressing itself to suffering, and as such the temporality of the attention that care entails is crucially different from the temporality of leisure, entertainment or efficiency.

The ‘other’ economy is however not just about caring labour, but also about other forms of work and exchange: what some might call the commons. Yet is it a separate sphere that is to be protected that’s at stake, or a relational dynamic that is to be expanded? If conceived as a separate sphere, this proposal runs the risk of idealising some work, forgetting that primitive accumulation – the transposition of self-organised activity into the sphere of surplus value extraction and material or organisational enclosure – is a process that happens on a sliding scale.

The wage: means or end for a feminist economics, or neither?

Whilst limited to a macroeconomic sectorial perspective, Donath’s proposal of the ‘other’ economy however also gets at the critique of wageification from a quantitative angle: simply trying to fit women and children into the existing economic model will not yield much because there is an absolute limit to the commercialisation of work. She argues for the recognition of a separate sphere of valorization of activity that is not

¹⁶ Folbre, Nancy (2005), *Caring Labour*, edited interview in *Transversal Webjournal*, Vol.08.

driven by money, even if it interfaces with the pecuniary constantly:

With increases in productivity in other sectors of the economy, a larger proportion of the workforce may be made available for work in the personal services sector, but even if the entire workforce works in this sector, there is a limit to 'production'. The maximum available quantity of personal services per person is considerably less than those provided by one person working full time. This is because one person's purchase of personal services is another person's supply, and children, the sick and the elderly are not available to provide personal services to others. This absolute limit applies no matter whether the personal services are provided in the market or the other economy.¹⁷

Following this argument, such application can only ever be partial and stratified in ways where such personal services will be paid less than other work – unless children and old people are integrated into formal economies and made to work. Indeed they do increasingly work as the economic crisis comes to be 'downloaded' into kitchens and homes, but informally: welfare cuts imply less state help with care, and unemployment means less money for contracting services is available, so women as well as old people and children increasingly take on care tasks and informal paid work (see also Chapter B.2). It appears to go beyond the cynical capacities of (neo)liberalism to propose an integration of children and elderly into waged work (however neo-communitarian proposals of incorporating such free work into the spheres of governance are increasingly used in conjuncture with neoliberal policy, as I explore in section C).

Is there thus a possibility of exploding capitalist economics in arguing for full wageification? J.K Gibson-Graham take such proposals with a pinch of salt (perhaps in a way similar to how many feminists relate to liberatory theories of immaterial labour). They say of feminist economics:

[...] underlying all these stances is the view that a more complete representation of the economy will inform a political transformation. In the epilogue to her book, Marilyn Waring takes it further, asserting that 'the system could not stand the pressure [of fully enumerating women's economic contribution] and would

¹⁷ Ibid, p.121

be transformed by the additions.’ (pg. 256) She suspects that the strategy of counting in will bring about the sort of economic revolution advocated by radical feminists; in Audre Lorde’s terms, Waring hopes to use the tools of the master to dismantle the master’s house.¹⁸

Indeed it is hard to imagine a wageification of all labouring activity that wouldn’t lead capitalism to collapse or have to seriously reconfigure, given that unpaid work makes for the bulk of economic activity even in industrialized countries; yet at the same time the path to such imaginary collapse seems paved with exploitation, immiseration and alienation. Capitalism does not include and accumulate on wholesale terms, but always differentially: the step by step inclusion of spheres of informal labour into those of waged labour amounts to the biopolitical paradigm we are seeing in the neoliberal epoch, where everyday life, relationality, cooperation and desire themselves are assumed as sites of value extraction and surplus production. It is not clear what kind of limit to this biopolitical shifting we might assume to exist, and how this might correspond to economic modelizations. The role of representation, and its possible political uses, are important discussion points in this context. Whilst such approaches, strategies and tools within feminist economics vary, what they have in common is a host of innovative approaches to perceiving and imagining what exists beneath and beyond capitalist formalities.

As such, feminist economics is good at pointing to the contradictions of capitalist as well as socialist imaginaries: if it is impossible for all work to be paid – under the liberal tenet that work is to be equally valued and fairly paid, and that children and old people should be excluded from it – then what model of economy and work may we embrace? The proposals here are many and differ widely: in running through some related considerations and alternative practices in this thesis, I consider that this question is best approached in relating macro-economic analyses to situated experiments, acknowledging the many different models of economy that emerge across historical and geographical contexts. Not a universal affirmation of the right way of doing capital-e ‘Economy’, but some points of situated reading and analysis. It is also this openness and multiplicity that I find most promising in feminist economics, proposing critical investigations and conversations without necessarily aspiring to universal answers.

¹⁸ See: Cameron, Jenny and Gibson-Graham, J.K (2003). *Feminising the economy: metaphors, strategies, politics* Gender, Place and Culture, 10: 2, p. 145-157.

Apart from a general expansion of social rights, there is however one universally framed proposal that seems promising for addressing systemic issues regarding capitalist relations and the redefinition of work: the basic income. This is, in the definition I find most acceptable, an unconditional regular payment made to people living in a given territory (not just citizens, if it is to entail an interesting politics of migration as well as work), similar to unemployment benefits but well above those in monetary value. Much spoken about since the beginning of the millennium, the basic income is not just attractive in moments of high unemployment and precarity, but also of interest to people labouring in the ‘other’ economy: home-makers, carers and informal workers of all kinds. It should guarantee a dignified basis of subsistence (its sum is to be calculated thus, beyond a benefit-style minimum payment) and thus enable workers (formal and informal alike) greater choice about what jobs and labours they take on. While in this shape, a basic income has the potential to produce great shifts not just in class-based but also in gendered and citizenship-based divisions of labour, it is clear that it will not transform those divisions without continued feminist and decolonial struggles.

Reproductive Labour and the Commons

Reproductive labour can equally be defined in more or less inclusive ways depending on what one considers to be reproductive of the societies we live in. We speak of ‘reproduction’ from within a capitalist context, where we might not just consider the home but also the informal and criminalized economies as crucial for the functioning of capitalist relations. Prisons and courts for instance are reproductive units in this sense, serving as sites where delinquency is produced and with it a kind of brutalised workforce that takes on the ‘dirty work’ in our societies (whether as soldiers, bouncers, bailiff boys, sex workers, drug dealers, factory workers, etc.)¹⁹. The massively growing prison populations of the US and other countries constitute human material for economies increasingly precarious, depending on ever-cheaper labour and potential soldiers for economic wars. Reproduction as such is inseparably tied to the capital-economy, and as with the wage, it is a point of contention whether it should be fought *for* or *against*.

More rights for housewives and prisoners or an abolition of housework and prisons

¹⁹ Zechner, M. (2012) *Prisons are reproductive units*. In: *The Paper*, Issue 3, January 2012.

altogether? The question appears rhetorical in the face of the fact that for most people, reproduction means survival and not a choice of career or lifestyle. This question around reproduction extends into a debate about the affirmation of the term in social movements, where some propose commoning as contradistinct to reproduction:

The infrastructures through which political movement forms, which draw into play our disaffections as well as compose new relations, what I refer to as a circuit of disaffection and affective composition, is something different to reproduction. If we understand reproduction to be the fundament or axiom of capitalist futurity, then when we succeed in these struggles, we are not involved in reproduction but the formation of different ways of living: against reproduction of the same and for variation, generation and recombination.²⁰

While I agree with the importance of building autonomous infrastructures and movements, I keep referring to 'reproduction' here as something that also concerns the practices of social movements and precarious subjects, since the practices of sharing that exist within them are not always distinguishable from capitalist economies in neat ways. While it appears important to differentiate reproduction and commoning, I also want to recognize that the blurring that we find between them today may be a point of departure for a politics of care that is capable of both reclaiming reproductive spheres and building new spaces of commoning. To abandon reproduction as term and terrain amounts to a purist move that's hardly conducive to building transversal movements in the current context of crisis and exploitation.

Indeed capitalist economics themselves have happily ignored reproduction, leaving the state to regulate this sphere and thus govern the social towards greater productivity. Reproduction is a dangerously subversive perspective on work, if radically claimed for. This is because capitalism hinges on so-called reproduction and extracts value from it. As DallaCosta and James say:

We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value. This is true of the entire female role as a personality which is subordinate at all levels,

²⁰ See Anonymous (2012) *Undercommons of Affect and the Critique of Labour*. Waywardwobbly Blog.

physical, psychical and occupational, which has had and continues to have a precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labour, in pursuit of productivity at the social level.²¹

As Silvia Federici shows in her historical study of primitive accumulation, women and the body in the transition to capitalism²², the point of saying that power renders bodies productive is not just that dominant power invests in the sphere of production. She shows that as the monetary economy and waged work internally divide subsistence economies (assigning women a subaltern place outside the wage and ‘work’), both new spheres come to be invested with technologies of power that assure their functionality towards value extraction. Beyond its patriarchal version, the separation between production and reproduction is still operative in the less gendered liberal capitalism. Without this separation, capitalism wouldn’t work.

Extending the argument that illegal/criminalized work as much as housework and care work are reproductive – as indeed the 5-sector model of Gubitzer points out – we may see entry into the criminal justice system as a kind of repeat biopolitical birth facilitated by state and capital, which reconfigures subjects as labour power on the lowest level via redefinition of their status: criminal records, residence permits, work permits, benefits, etc. The life cycle of individuals is strewn with such reproductive moments of legal and subjective configuration: schools, armies, hospitals are all spaces that mold, mark and grade individuals towards specific utility within the re/production of capital. Here we are dealing with biopower, as the concrete subjugation of bodies to the state’s molds. Across Marx, Foucault and feminist economics there thus emerges a promising reading of reproduction as key site of struggle, requiring alliances across spheres of subalternity.

If the reproductive sphere is primarily defined by its being invisibilized, undervalued and overexploited – and not by some essential or fundamental difference from ‘production’ – we can see that it reaches far beyond the home. In these invisibilized spaces our worlds get reproduced – that is, carefully sustained as spaces of care, but also systematically and violently domesticated. To avoid the random violence of reproduction as domestication, communities need to take reproduction in their own

²¹ Costa, M. D. and S. James (1972). Women and the subversion of the community, by Mariarosa Dalla Costa; and, A woman’s place, by Selma James. Bristol, Falling Wall Press. p.17

²² See Federici, Caliban and the Witch.

hands, turning violence into care and commoning. As biopolitics and sovereignty run side by side in contemporary states, resistance to them must entail care both as de/subjectivation and as a fight for bodies free from dominance.

Judith Revel draws on the concept of the commons in her narration of the shadow economy, describing it as an economy hidden away in the shadow spaces of the bourgeois house (this house representing the liberal idea of economics) while keeping this very house running:

In bourgeois homes, the ‘commons’ have long since been sites of domesticity: the space that one subtracts from the view of possible visitors – who one to the contrary hoists in the rooms of ‘representation’ - at the same time as the ensemble of functions that don’t have a right to the civil in the purist theatre of social relations (the kitchens, the toilets, the storage spaces, the utility room). It is drawn curtains before which those people who despite assuring the everyday functioning of the mansion find themselves, being paradoxically excluded from the theatre. The commons, that’s the domain of shadows, the back rooms of a stage that unquestionably benefits from domesticity, that at the same time wouldn’t exist without this stage.²³

If all free and underpaid labour moved out of the shadows, out of the commons, into the domain of waged labour, were transformed into services, shifted towards the market, then minimum wage standards would have to apply to it. Revisiting Donath’s argument we may consider that this is not plausible, because it is impossible for all reproductive work to be contracted out without a large gap between high and low wages – a sliding but resilient division between those who can afford to buy themselves into the spectacle as observers; those who perform in the spectacle, theatrically and diplomatically negotiating their existence between the spectators and the backstage; and those who pull the cords and prepare the props behind the curtain. The curtain shifts with changing legislations and rules.

It is impossible to have services (the stage and parts of the backstage) without the other economy (backstage). If all our life-sustaining needs were taken care of by professionals

²³ Revel, J. (2008). *Common*, in: Vocabulaboratories.

- care workers, psychologists, interior designers, project coordinators, sex workers, artists, etc. - there would be no way for everyone to afford to buy such work. What a person earns doing center-stage work may be enough to hire an exploitable illegal worker, but it would not suffice to contract a fairly paid service. To make enough money to fairly pay people working in the other economy, their contractors have to make about double the wage of that worker. The considerations of feminist economics and postcolonial theory²⁴ present a radical limit to what a traditional labour perspective (as embodying a specifically capitalist regime of value), can do with regards to the other economy. It is only through revising our ideas of economics and citizenship (as the colonial framing of wage labour) at large that these questions can be addressed. And it is through looking at the intelligences and modes of exchange, gift, care and invention that go on in the commons that we can come to envisage another world through another economy.²⁵

In the chapter to follow, further moving towards situating my enquiry in the context of social movements, I will explore the term ‘precarity’ in giving a brief genealogy of its emergence within the EuroMayDay movements and beyond. I will be pointing to the ways in which a new cartography of work practices and their relation to life emerged in the first decade of the millennium, entailing new forms of collective organisation as well as new imaginaries and protagonisms of creativity.

This section has further introduced theories of feminist economics and of post-Fordism with regards to their implications for definitions and politics of work. We have explored some relations between oikos and economy, between home-based reproductive work and reproductive work as happening in the sphere of labour. One key question this raises is ‘how to speak about unpaid work across different spheres?’

24 See for example Bidaseca, K. and Vazquez Laba, V. (2011) Feminismos y Poscolonialidad. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Godot, as well as Lopez Gil, S. and Pérez Orozco, A. (2011) Desigualdades a flor de piel: Cadenas Globales de Cuidados. Madrid: Exterior Ministry and UN Womens Division.

²⁵ Zooming into the diagram of In/formal Labour in Appendix 3, we may say that what is at stake in this thesis is predominantly the instances that run to and from self-organization (the labels in the diagram are very approximately placed, their range is wide!). This concerns three main (1) My primary focus in this thesis are the pathways from the informal fields towards self-organization (organized networks and institutions of the common), pointing towards (2) those running from there to the more formal economy (such as cooperatives) as well as (3) thirdly to more subsistence-based forms of self-organization (gardening, mutual aid, etc). The journey towards other notions of work and self-organisation, in the instance of this thesis that bases itself in a generation of activists growing up with the alter-globalisation and mayday movements, has an important base in the term ‘precarity’. For an exploration of the relation of my approach to Autonomist and Post-Fordist trajectories, see Appendix 6.

We have seen that not only work but also economics is a contested term and territory, and that speaking of it can never be neutral but implies a political positioning and gesture. Looking towards a first level of contemporary configurations of the 'other' of wage labour, we will now map out the politics of the term 'precarity', a new way of speaking about work that has emerged with strong relation to social movements. In doing so, we will begin to explore how this composes with the two further spheres of 'other' work – reproductive and migrant labour – at stake here.

A .3. Precariousness beyond creativity: some inflexions on care and collectivity

‘Precarity’ is a word that has at its root the notion of ‘obtaining something by prayer’, and refers to a condition of insecurity, instability and vulnerability that concerns ones work and life alike. Precarity plays out via short-term contracts, no-contract work, bad pay, deprivation of rights and status, vulnerability to mobbing, competition and pressure, high rent, lack of accessible public services, etc. Precarity isn’t linked to a specific type of employment status, but is a condition of insecurity whereby one is at the mercy of others, always having to beg, network, compete in order to be able to pursue ones labour and life. It is the paradoxical state of being overworked and insecure, no matter whether one is in or out of employment.¹

Precarity, creativity and movements

Precarity and the neoliberal

The notion of ‘precarity’ has been widely used to refer not simply to underpaid labour, nor to a specific type of employment relation, but more specifically to the conditions that come with a labouring life that sits between formality and informality, between wage labour and free labour, between invisible informal economies and the market. Precarity forges modes of living marked by multitasking and juggling with microeconomics at each step – even if one’s ‘household’ or ‘self-employment’ budget is virtually non-present, and if one’s multi-tasking isn’t valorized as ‘work’. Unlike those unemployed, the ‘precarious’ can not make official demands or claims for benefits: with

¹ Precarious Workers Brigade (2011) Precarity: a People’s Tribunal, unpublished script. The people’s tribunal on precarity was a one-day event organised by the PWB at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London, inviting cultural producers to join an assessment of cases of precarious work in their sector. The tribunal focused around four domains of precarity: relating to institutions, the body, work and migration. See Precarious Workers Brigade (2011) Tools for Collective Action: Precarity, a People’s tribunal.

the privatisations that follow the 1970s more informal, unpaid and badly paid work appears, encompassing too few rights or too little pay for people to establish a secure livelihood. To be precarious is to constantly economize, speculate, compete and cooperate.

The adjective ‘precarious’ (first used in the 14th century as ‘precaire’) means ‘obtained by entreaty’ and etymologically derives from the Latin root ‘prex’, ‘prec’, referring to prayer. To be precarious refers to a temporary state wherein one obtains things by humble request, depending on another to grant them, never guaranteed or durably. The noun ‘precarité’ first appears in 1823 in the *Dictionnaire universel de la langue française*.² In the English language, the term ‘precarity’ appeared with 1950s in Social Christianity Movements, as a ‘condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material and psychological welfare’³. Since the 1980s, precarity has been a term and subject of social sciences as well as political debates, notably in France, Germany⁴ and Italy (‘Prekaritaet’ in German, ‘Precarietà’ in Italian, ‘Precarité’ in French), which began to be used to speak about living and working conditions related to youth unemployment which however weren’t inscribed in any regulatory framework⁵. Precarity has been widely seen as a problem concerning primarily young people entering a labour market that no longer holds stable jobs that pay for living, or even jobs at all. As such it also marks a generational matter, referring to conditions to which young people are more likely to be exposed in post-welfare states.

Neoliberal governance produces a precarious labour force by abolishing mutualist forms of wealth and risk distribution and encouraging competition. It reduces stability, welfare and collective bargaining in favour of more flexible and individualized patterns of exploitation. Mutualism is replaced by policies calculating individual risk in favour of maximizing individual profit: neoliberalism is the meritocratic and bureaucratic ‘government of inequalities’⁶. Maurizio Lazzarato illustrates this tendency towards the

² Boiste, P. C. V. (1823) *Dictionnaire universel de la langue française, avec le Latin et les étymologies. Pan-lexique*. Paris, Verdière.

³ Wikipedia entry on ‘Precarity (Social Christianity)’ March 2001.

⁴ See Schultheis, F., & Herold, S. (2010). *Précarité und Prekarität: Zur Thematisierung der sozialen Frage des 21. Jahrhunderts im deutsch-französischen Vergleich*. In: Busch, M., Jeskow, J. and Stuetz, R. (2010) *Zwischen Prekarisierung und Protest*. Bielefeld: transcript. pp. 243-274.

⁵ See European Union (1998-2001) *Evaluation de la mise en oeuvre d’une politique de lutte contre la précarité des jeunes dans les pays de l’UE*, Research project financed by the European Commission in the context of TSER (Targeted Socio-Economic Research).

⁶ See Lazzarato, M. (2009), *Experimentations Politiques*. Paris, Editions Amsterdam.

privatization and individualization of risk in the example of the French National Professional Union for Employment in Industry and Trade (Unedic), which was extrapolated from the state as a mutualist body and turned into an independent association operating on the principles of insurance, in 2009: ‘From the viewpoint of reformers, the mechanisms of unemployment insurance [assurance chômage] are not meant to compensate disequilibrium produced by the system: their function is not to reduce inequalities, but on the contrary to keep everyone in differential inequality as relating to all the others.’⁷ Precarity is one of the key configurations of those regimes of flexible differentiation and permanently shifting inequality.

Fordism and post-Fordism: locating the exception

Social movements have organized around the term ‘precarity’ in speaking of it as a condition of existence that both enslaves and carries potential for autonomy. As Gerald Raunig says in a text on the Barcelona Mayday of 2004: ‘[...] the ambivalent concept of precariousness simultaneously refers to the non-self-determined insecurity of all areas of life and work, as well as to the possible invention of new forms of resistance and the chance of newly forming as “precariat”, “cognitariat”, “affectariat”’.⁸ Alex Foti: ‘The precariat is to postindustrialism as the proletariat was to industrialism: the non-pacified social subject.’⁹ EuroMayDay movements often address precarity in reference to theories of post-Fordism and autonomy, attempting to imagine ways of working that challenge the (post-)industrial capitalist logic. For some theorists and militants, this comes with strong claims about historical subjectivity – which might in some instances run counter to the inventive and careful weaving of transversal ties that the production of such subjectivity necessitates.

As some thinkers^{10 11} in this vein have recently pointed out, Fordism and the division of labour and social contracts that came with it, may indeed be understood as a western exception, a production paradigm that made it possible for certain subjects at a certain time and place to ignore precarity. What appears as a fading normality in western populations is an unknown in many other places. The link between stable (male) wage

⁷ Lazzaratto, M. (2009), *Experimentations Politiques*, p.18. My translation from French.

⁸ Raunig, G. (2004): *La Inseguriada Vencera. Anti-Precariousness Activism and Mayday Parades*, *Republicart Journal*, Eipcp.

⁹ Foti, A. (2006): *MAYDAY MAYDAY! euro flex workers, time to get a move on!* Blog entry.

¹⁰ Raunig, G. (2007) *The Monster-Precariat*. *Translate Webjournal*, eipcp.

¹¹ Neilson, B. and Rossiter, N. (2008), *Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception*. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2008; 25; Sage Publishers.

labour and state benefits to balance re/productivity that the Fordist model was based upon has been undone with the neoliberal outsourcing of industry to developing nations.¹² As such, while technically speaking much Fordist labour has been relocated to the global south since the 1970s, this is merely a matter of shifting industrial production rather than transposing the entire Fordist social model beyond the west. The production that was outsourced happens under conditions of informality and unprotectedness today, a stark difference to what Fordism meant in the West. As such, the appearance of post-colonially outsourced industrialisation has little to do with the Fordist welfare state moment springing from 1950s and 1960s. Hence rather than referring to Fordism as a mode of organising production, we may point out that the Fordist social contract is a historical exception.

This is one of the reasons why precarity cannot merely be seen as a negative phenomenon from within the normative frame of the welfare state, as a lack or absence (of state support, fixed jobs, economic wonders), but as pointing to broader problems around capitalist economics, global exploitations of labour and social reproduction. Precarity-organising must move beyond citizenship and rights-based politics in order to give rise to practices that are affirmative of life and work in ways different to those of capitalism and patriarchy. As long as concepts of economics base themselves around work as industrial production, ignoring or criminalizing informal and care economies that lie in their shadow (while those are what feeds and sustains them), and as long as hopes for democracy base themselves around citizenship and Fordist models of social contract, it will be hard to think precarity as more than an exception within neo-colonial and patriarchal economics.

Feminist theorizations of reproductive labour and economics come closest to addressing this problem at its base, taking into account other models of reproduction and thus pointing to the need to envisage other kinds of economics.¹³ Precarity movements have emphasised that the fight for rights is important for survival on the ground, yet that it is not desirable to merely address the normativity of the state in the long run. A new politics of reproduction and care is required in order to articulate the movements of

¹² See also this Table outlining Fordist-PostFordist shifts: Foti, A. (2007) *The Grid& the Fork Table*. Left Curve No.31.

¹³ See Tronto, J. C. (1994). Moral boundaries., Werlhof, C. V. (2010). Vom Diesseits der Utopie, and also Olympe (2010): Issue on Care Economics.

precarious workers with broader mobilizations. Autonomist theory mostly looks at precarity in terms of class composition, beyond the singular instances of struggle which ‘[...] all encounter a barrier in capitalism’s subordination of every use-value to the universal logic of exchange. There thus exists the possibility for these discrete ‘molecular’ movements to unfurl into a general ‘molar’ confrontation on class lines [...]. Such linkage is the route to the political recomposition of the socialised working class.’¹⁴ My analysis of precarious work and its modes of organizing here remains bound to singular instances and networked compositions, which I analyze in terms of their re/production of subjectivity and transversal practices. The questions of reproduction and care that I address throughout this thesis point to ways of escaping universal logics of exchange, while however remaining grounded in the discourses and practices of corresponding movements. The question of molar confrontations along class lines does not immediately pose itself here, since it is a reformulation of certain Autonomist-Marxist problematics towards Feminist perspectives of a politics of care that is at stake. My confrontation with movements of Autonomia and Post-Fordist labour will eventually lead me from Precarity to matters of Care and Collectivity.

MAYDAY! ‘Precarity’ as code word for transversal struggles?

As a term for political organizing, precarity has (since about 2000) been taken up by a generation of people born in the 70s and 80s, living in the crumbling welfare states of Europe and beyond. It is clear that the term ‘precarity’ and its politicizations have not seen a homogeneous development in different languages and places. I will give a (brief and inevitably incomplete) summary of the way networked political groups in Europe have taken it up around the millennium. In the early 2000s, ‘precarity’ came to be problematized by social movements notably in Italy, Spain and France. As Alex Foti, and Italian militant and writer active in the Milanese Mayday movement, narrates:

Since 2001, a network of Italian, French and Catalan media hacktivists, rank-and-file unions, self-run and squatted youth centers, critical mass bikers, radical networks, student groups, labor collectives, immigrants’ associations, assorted communists, greens, anarchists, gays and feminists have given life to the MayDay Parade taking place in the afternoon of 1 May in the center of Milan, Italy. Milan MayDay has steadily grown in participation and meaning from 5,000 people in 2001 to 50,000 people in 2003. MayDay 2004 mobilizations of precari@s in Milano and Barcelona saw

¹⁴ Dyer Whiteford, N. (2004) *Autonomous Marxism and the Information Society*. In: *Multitudes Web*.

100,000 demonstrators parading for organizing and social rights as a way out of generalized precarity. MayDay has proved to be a horizontal method of cross-networking the Genoa movement with the radical sections of unionism - thereby enabling an alliance between two generations of conflict based on subvertising, picketing, organizing and the proliferation of multiple methods of action.¹⁵

The association of Mayday with precarity was born in this context, emerging in Italy from preparations for the Genoa Counter-Summit to the G8. This period was an important moment of the anti/alter-globalization movement, where counter-summits and protesting youth gained a new kind of visibility (and wherein the murder of a young protester by Genovese police caused outrage internationally), and the notion of networked struggle came to be a *mot d'ordre* within political circles, giving rise to a variety of practices. The combination of a movement of youth and young adults, a new brand of insecure flexi-workers and a networked protest against the global power elite necessitated new words and methods for addressing common conditions and struggle. 'Precarity' was one key response emerging from the new movement formation. As Foti continues:

Many of the deepening transeuropean networks - cross-pollinated at the Florence and Paris Social Forums - have effectively begun to assess the existing political scenarios and realise the possibilities for the radical organization of young precaries on a eurowide scale. There is now a widespread impression across these networks that two decades of precarity have brought a new, and possibly disruptive, sociopolitical identity into being - an identity based on the young/female/foreign-born workers laboring in the service, retail, media and knowledge industries. These are the people agitating and striking for their rights in all of the European metropolises.¹⁶

The subsequent mayday mobilizations aimed at a young generation of flexibilized, precarious workers, based on knowledges and practices around networking and new-media which had been developed in the course of the antiglobalization movement: the logic of the swarm¹⁷, networked organising¹⁸, alternative media production¹⁹ and

¹⁵ Foti, A. (2006). *MAYDAY MAYDAY!*

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See for instance: Nunes, Rodrigo (2006): *Nothing is what democracy looks like: Openness,*

adusting and media stunts were ripe at that moment. In these understandings of creative, transversal and networked struggle, the functions of identity and membership were no longer seen as useful to political organising, rather deemed to exclude a multitude of people from political engagement. Mayday, and the shared condition of ‘precarity’ it called upon, aimed to mobilise a social movement beyond established organisations, institutions and political groups to inspire young and politically non-aligned people to join a new, more inspiring, post-identitarian and arguably also more ‘flexible’ mode of militancy. Many precarious people perceive themselves as not really fitting into the categories of class, employment status or identity, and as requiring an organisational paradigm for solidarity and struggle that operates beyond those categories – and thus also beyond unions (I come to this in more detail below).

After 2004, MAYDAY became EuroMayDay (see EuroMayDay website) - having become increasingly trans-European as a coordinated effort towards organizing precarious workers across Europe (with active nodes notably in Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, France). The discourses and practices that had emerged from the mayday movement mostly spoke to young, flexible, new-media savvy workers; now they came to be addressed to precarious workers more globally, including migrants and all kinds of service workers. The Wikipedia entry on ‘Precarity(Mayday)’ – which has interestingly been merged into a general article on ‘Precarity’, based on a discussion about Eurocentrism²⁰ – points to the key difficulties arising from this:

More problematic is the fact that precarity seems to conflate two categories of workers that are at opposite ends of labor market segmentation in postindustrial economies: pink collars working in retail and low-end services (cleaners, janitors, etc.) under constrictive but standardized employment norms; and young talent temping for cheap in the information economy of big cities around the world: the creative class of strongly individualistic workers illustrated by managerial literature.²¹

horizontality and the movement of movements, Interactivist Web Platform, or Nunes, Rodrigo (2005) *Networks, Open Spaces, Horizontality: Instantiations*, *Ephemera Journal*, Issue 5-2.

¹⁸ See Ibid.

¹⁹ The Indymedia Platform originated in this moment. For a reference closer to the pre-histories of the movements I am investigating here, see also the platform www.kein.org, which was an important node in connecting media activist practices in the ten years following the millenium.

²⁰ See this debate on Wikipedia, entry on ‘Precarity[Euromayday]’, 2011 edit.

²¹ Ibid.

As a condition, ‘precarity’ is shared by an increasing number of people across all fields of work and across the planet, since it accompanies neoliberal policies of marketisation and neo-colonial practices of outsourcing and migration management that have been spreading fast in recent decades. Thus the challenge of linking precarious subjects across the spectrum of post-Fordist and migration-based struggle came to be inscribed at the core of the notion of ‘precarity’: along with the network logic, it marked an aspiration to connect, break across borders and create improbable alliances.

The Autonomist ethos of self-representation strongly featured in the precarity politics surrounding the EuroMayDay. However the diversity of subjective and concrete positions that ‘precarity’ was to stand for posed some difficulties to self-representation. Where to speak from, in what voice? If self-representation was not easy to achieve, there was however a culture of (networked) self-problematization (as in the cited Wikipedia article on ‘precarity’) which many traditional political forms and discourses could indeed not afford: the Zapatista saying ‘preguntando caminamos’ [‘asking questions, we walk’] was seen as important to a politics that didn’t want to fall back on itself and get stuck in rigid categories. The 2010 definition of ‘precarity’ forged by mayday Lisboa and Porto in their joint manifesto shows how broad a condition they are speaking about when they say ‘precarity’ – their way of resolving the contradictions that may appear when one tries to define precarity sociologically is a poetic and inventive one:

To be precarious is to be wood for each and every spoon.

To be precarious is to not have a profession or office.

To be precarious is to intern on professionalization programmes only to animate government statistics.

To be precarious is to not be sure if you can find a job tomorrow.

To be precarious is to not have the right to unemployment support, even if you have worked a lot already and are out of work now.

To be precarious is to be obliged to make savings even if you don’t make money.

To be precarious is to receive a miserable salary and fatten up the capital of temporary job agencies, whose majority is run by the rich boys and by big party

leaders.²²

Local EuroMayDay initiatives developed discursive (see Precariousunderstanding blog) and media strategies for addressing ‘precarity’, from websites to slogans, imagery and formats for direct action. These are often funky, colourful (often pink, in reference to the feminisation of labour and to queer-feminism) and snappy, recalling the nature of mayday as a joyful parade (resonant with the mood of Gay Pride and Reclaim the Streets) and showing a youthful, anti-conservative spirit. They include attempts at connecting transversally to other domains of labour and struggle, as the slogan of the 2006 mayday launch in Brussels reflects: ‘no borders, no precarity, fuck the new inequality!’ – echoed in the Bristol call to the Brussels NoBorder camp of 2010: ‘No borders, no precarity, no to fossil Europe and fuck austerity!’²³ Yet the reach of such calls isn’t always as wide as desired: migrant workers associations, associations of people without papers, factory workers, care workers, sex workers, informal workers of all kinds are only sometimes found amongst the crowds marching against ‘precarity’. The discursive and political strategies surrounding ‘precarity’ were forged by young, flexible knowledge-workers²⁴ and to a large extent remained most legible to them.

Precarity and Invention

While the main theoretical references of precarity movements are focussed around work as production, as post-Fordist, much precarity organising integrated a critique of ‘feminised’ and ‘free’ forms of labour. The focus however remained to be jobs and work in the more formal economy (services for instance). The creative industries, as a relatively young sector running on feminised and unpaid work whilst reaping its profits through an industrial model, often took centre stage in theorizations of precarity. Much precarity organising came to be characterized by a focus of creativity and invention as intervention, by an affirmation of new modes of work: of the new in the face of the old, of resistance as consisting in counter-production rather than merely in opposition.

Movements relating to the idea of precarity have addressed the fragmentation of labour

²² Mayday Lisboa and Porto (2010) *Joint Manifesto*. Mayday Lisboa Blog. Translated from Portuguese by Cristina Ribas.

²³ Globalproject (2006), Call for 2010 Brussels No Border Camp. Blog post.

²⁴ As in the case of Milan, many activists were working in the media and fashion industries, from the newly forged ‘Creative Industries’ wherein flexible and precarious work was programmed to be the norm. See for instance the Milan Fashion week anti-precarity action of Serpica Naro (Indymedia UK, 2005), and also the Precaria and Serpica Naro blogs.

and the wage form and moved towards an affirmation of the fight for social rights in view of a joyful way of addressing and making productive the ambivalence between work and life, of collective invention beyond the factory-family-consumption triangle. They follow the Autonomist idea of affirming the potentials of politicizing post-Fordist subjectivity, addressing themselves primarily to flexi-workers in the service industries, while echoing other struggles (migrant, unemployed, etc.). Refusal, virtuosity and joyful revolt have been key aspects to many such mobilizations, as in the call for participation in the 2010 Euromayday events in Geneva:

In the face of precarity ... creativity!

We possess the tools and the imagination to propose other ideas, other ways of being together, other forms of work and production. Let's use fewer goods and create more links, let's re-learn how to get pleasure rather than money! Let's re-vindicate diversity against mediocrity, roughness against uniformity, joyful noise against depressive silence, organic and abundant disorder against the conformist order, the shared difference [partage] between young and old people against youthism, harmony between women and men against alienating stereotypes.

Let's anticipate changes to come, propose creative alternatives to the globalizing culture of business that puts profit above all, let's be more than ever at the heart of the creation of a world that will become more beautiful and full of solidarity.²⁵

Precarity movements took the idea that 'another world is possible' seriously and imagined new ways of being in solidarity, focussing around networked organisation, production and translation: EuroMayDay is the most dominant 'interventionist attempt at forging a political subjectivity' (Arianna Bove) following the alter-globalization social movements. It has allowed for precarity to emerge as more than the name of a problematic condition that is to be abolished, but as a term that also holds a promise, an affirmation, a creative practice and a new sensitivity that perhaps sees vulnerability as constitutive of ways of working and living in common. The EuroMayDay movements took it upon themselves to invent a whole new culture, symbolism, discourse and

²⁵ Euromayday Geneve (2010) Mayday 2010 callout text. My translation.

choreography of dissent: from the use of speech bubbles as placards, to the use of superhero costumes, masks and other carnevalesque elements at demonstrations, to the image of the rabbit as symbolizing the mass precarious worker²⁶, to the creation of songs²⁷ and dances²⁸, to the creation of ‘San Precario’ and a whole set of other saints of precarity, found on prayer cards across many countries and languages.

Yet creativity is also a problematic term in this nexus. On the one hand, because of the way EuroMayDay is closely linked to struggle in the creative sector, which via Creative Industries Policies becomes a laboratory for formatting neoliberal subjectivities²⁹. Creativity comes to stand for exploitation, short term, non-committal work and individualism. EuroMayDay resists such subjectivation but at the same time is also structured by it: operating a *détournement* of the neoliberal form of subjectivity in favour of joyful forms of dissent³⁰.

Work, life and fragile togetherness

As precarious workers juggle the intimacies of informal cooperation with the need to compete to make money, they are variously confronted with the question of how to apply care and creativity to making a living. Constant self-reinvention is a must in the neoliberal context; to counter the instability this brings, modes of self-care that allow for perspectives of sustainability come to be vital for surviving materially as well as psycho-emotionally. Precarious workers face a general absence of longer-term modes of meaningful collectivity to fall back on. Neither intensive collaborative projects, temp jobs or small-scale illegal work offer much continuity of relations and mutual support. Precarity makes it difficult to construct sustainable worlds of conviviality. At the same time, struggle for survival needs to be rooted in the everyday, whether in negotiating access to welfare and wellbeing³¹, juggling underpaid flexi-work with care work or trying to invent alternative modes of collaborating and flatsharing. ‘Informal’ knowledge abounds, ways of moving through the social are highly aware and often strategic – yet collectivity can hardly be facilitated beyond opportunistic instances.

²⁶ See for instance the ‘Propaganda’ page on the Euromayday Blog.

²⁷ See Prekaer Café (2011) ‘Noch zu Warten ist Wahnsinn’, Song-Call for the 2011 Mayday Parade in Vienna.

²⁸ See Mayday Malaga (2008) ‘Chiqui Chiqui Precario’ Dance-Call for the Malaga Parade 2008.

²⁹ See for instance Raunig, G., Ray, G., and Wuggenig, U. (2011) *Critique of Creativity*.

³⁰ See also Kanngieser, A. (2013) *Experimental Politics and the Making of Worlds*. London, Ashgate.

³¹ For migration related examples, see for instance Torrebadella, L., Tejero, E. and Lemkow, L. (2001): *Mujeres y la lucha cotidiana por el bienestar*. Barcelona, Icaria.

Under what conditions can informality give rise to self-organization? The protocols of neoliberal governance create one kind of informality – illegal, invisible, individualized, exploitable. The intelligences that precarious workers develop in these contexts (juggling ever changing and ambivalent situations of work and life, strategizing around plan As and plan Bs, finding temporary accomplices³²) are underpinned by an enforced expertise in the formalities of bureaucracy and management. Precarity implies an overlapping of work and life, which produces much need for informal negotiation yet is at the same time highly constricted via policies and protocols that determine access to rights, work or benefits. Precarious people are experts in the ever-changing systems of neoliberal governance, whether to do with work contracts, migration status or access to benefits or healthcare.

Precarity is thus not a structureless, but mostly a hyperstructured condition of living and working: time becomes fragmented, ‘cellularized’³³ and highly valuable. Every cell of time is assigned to a different task or job, often overlapping in order to maximize efficiency: times of ‘life’ and times of ‘work’ come to blur, since everything counts towards the functionality of surviving. It takes a long time to travel to job centres, sites of temp work, to queue and fill in forms: there is no longer a happy unemployed status that implies ‘not having work’. With the neoliberal governance of the self and others, everything counts towards work, while work as steady employment is undermined.

The point is not that informality disempowers while formality empowers, or vice versa: it is about imagining autonomous forms of formality and informality. Autonomy means setting one’s own usages, customs and laws (‘nomos’). The involuntary, ceaseless reinvention of such customs is not autonomy; nor is the aloneness of the competitive individual. It is when customs, laws and usages can contribute towards sustaining the worlds, relations and lives we desire that we may speak of autonomy.

Identifying with precarity: critiques

What does it take for precariousness to become a basis for organising, for developing

³² See for instance Ziemer, Gesa and Weber, Barbara (2007) Komplizenschaften: Ein Forschungsfilm. DVD, 33 Minutes, ZdHK Publishers, Zuerich.

³³ Franco Berardi uses this term to denote time that is fractured by communications technologies and networks. See Berardi, F. B. (2009) Precarious Rhapsody, edited by Erik Empson and Stevphen Shukaitis. New York, Autonomedia.

new struggles, subjectivities and solidarities? Answers concern both questions around the way militancy is structured (who has what kind of time and access to spaces?) and the way its discourse can be heard by others (what language/dialect is spoken?). The question of transversality has been key to all critiques of precarity – who is precarious, how do they express themselves? Yet alliances and solidarity build upon real-life connections, shared and sustained processes and territories as much as on concepts and practices. Beyond the conceptual, how to build a ‘common’ across different experiences? What are the different temporalities of work and life that are at work in precarity?

However one defines it, the precariat is far from being homogeneous. The teenager who flits in and out of the internet café while surviving on fleeting jobs is not the same as the migrant who uses his wits to survive, networking feverishly while worrying about the police. Neither is similar to the single mother fretting where the money for next week’s food bill is coming from or the man in his 60s who takes casual jobs to help pay medical bills. But they all share a sense that their labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure).³⁴

Many tensions and faultlines run across precarity, because ‘precarity, despite being a common condition among all workers, is a condition that divides. The production of profit imposes an organization of labour that disconnects and connects workers: labour is increasingly fragmented, marked by differences and hierarchies that are founded on contract, gender, ethnicity and citizenship.’³⁵ How can a shared sense of exploitation and insecurity be affirmatively made into solidarity? How to make precarity’s constitutive differentials of class, education, privilege and location productive? Following the first wave of Mayday movements in continental Europe – perhaps we could date this somewhere between 1999 and 2009 – the term ‘precarity’ and its related organisational strategies have come under re-evaluation within social movements. Who can identify with precarity, who can articulate and practice it in an affirmative way? There are many overlapping problematics, which I will now outline.

³⁴ Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat : the new dangerous class*. p. 13

³⁵ Sconessione Precarie [Precarious (dis)Connections] (2011) *From precarious workers to precarity: to say farewell to both*. Blog entry. My translation from Italian.

Dominance of the discursive

Precarity-focussed movements have produced a range of symbolic, performative, visual and tactical tools for naming and engaging an increasingly common condition. Yet how may these materialise in a set of sustainable and transversal political practices? Guy Standing thinks that ‘The evolution of the precariat as the agency of a politics of paradise is still to pass from theatre and visual ideas of emancipation to a set of demands that will engage the state rather than merely puzzle or irritate it.’³⁶ Whether one agrees with the idea of a politics of paradise or with engaging the state, a central question is how to move from discourses to sustained practices and organisation. How can protest and production give way to shared practices of everyday struggle and reproduction – beyond the virtuosic environments of so-called ‘immaterial’ production? Where it is hard to forge direct connections between people, to have conversations and encounters, one easily turns to other means of communication and representation (online, in print, in presence). Given their sensibilities, EuroMayDay protesters put much energy into developing a new political style, new ways of delivering a political message, of informing and becoming visible whilst avoiding a unifying representational strategy.

Speaking across experiences of class, age and migration

The specific analysis and discourse that EuroMayDay has developed does not necessarily resonate with other workers who may share similar conditions. The neoliberal subjectivity that EuroMayDay interpellates – as creative, expressive and flexible – does not extend across class. Critiques of the nuclear family, of identity and work do not easily translate beyond (mostly young) people with access to technology, higher education and a certain mobility: what everyday practices of listening and translation can make transversal relations possible? Standing again:

Leaders of the EuroMayDay protesters did their best to paper over the cracks, literally as in their visual images and posters. Some emphasised a unity of interests between migrants and others (migranti e precarie was a message emblazoned on a Milan EuroMayDay poster of 2008) and between youth and the elderly, as sympathetically juxtaposed on the Berlin EuroMayDay poster of

³⁶ Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat*, p. 15

2006.³⁷

To untangle the question about class and precarity slightly, I will propose a differentiation between two notions of class, both of which play into my argument here. One concerns conditions of work and another concerns the cultures formed around shared working or economic situations. A question often echoed is this one: The precariat may well appear as a class in itself, but how might it become a class *for* itself?³⁸ This is a contentious matter depending on definitions.

Along a classical Marxist definition of class, as well as more sociological descriptions, precarity indeed corresponds to a particular way of being integrated into divisions of labour, as a class *in* itself. Precarity describes a certain way of producing and reproducing ones life. Indeed, if one considers the Fordist social contract as historically specific, contemporary precarious work appears just as ‘working class’ as pre-Fordist wage labour.

Then there is class as defined by taste and culture: many precarious cultures and corresponding forms of indignation (as witnessed in the 15M too, for instance) are culturally steeped in what may be called middle-class tastes and sensitivities, a certain affirmation of civilian rights, individual creativity and self-realisation. This is often pointed out to discredit precarity-organising as a middle class privilege³⁹, or equally to sub-culturally differentiate precarious work from Fordist subjectivity (in considering Fordism as the norm).

The definition of a class *for* itself raises the question of self-affirmation, a more complicated matter hinging upon shared material conditions as well as cultural forms, and asking what kinds of subjectivities, associations and alliances need to emerge to produce the Precariat as social-political force. This depends on how shared conditions produce not just shared cultural forms, but furthermore also alliances and organisational forms (beyond merely subcultural self-identification and also beyond modes of union organising stuck with Fordist models of labour). In this sense, beyond the Fordist-

³⁷ Ibid, p.2

³⁸ See Raunig, G. (2007) *The Monster-Precariat*.

³⁹ See for instance the section on ‘This is only a middle class issue’ in the FAQ of the Carrot Workers Collective Blog.

postFordist paradigm, we may read the notes of Collective 'Sconnessioni Precarie' in Bologna:

The fact is that precarious workers have never been a category. Precarity is not a sector of the labour market, it is the general condition of contemporary living labour. Precarity is not a matter of the lack of stability of the individual worker on any particular job, it is a matter of class, because it is an expression of the relationship between labour and capital.⁴⁰

To productively pose the question of class in relation to precarity, then, is to ask how shared conditions can become commons, give rise to self-organising practices that challenge or eschew the relationship between labour and capital.

Limited to the global north / Europe

Broad and coordinated precarity-related movements have been a phenomenon bound to 'developed' countries, particularly Europe. Responding to the decomposition of a welfare state system somewhat specific to those countries, they engaged questions of labour, flexibility and migration in view to experiences of citizens coming to be deprived of social rights. 'If precarity is the condition of all labour, it cannot be enclosed within national borders or viewed from a solely European perspective. Mobility of labour and capital is the measure of the organization of contemporary production.'⁴¹ How to engage less privileged experiences of migration and work through the lens of precarity?

Connectionism

The organisation and conceptualisation of political and working spaces in terms of networks has produced a new sensitivity to interconnectedness, to both the autonomy and heteronomy of actors within a network. The emergence of this sensitivity is a key condition for the invention of new modes of political practice, yet in itself does not achieve it. Connectionism often insists on the existence of links without questioning their very texture, quality, configuration or strength, taking a superficial notion of connectedness/togetherness as a guarantor of things holding together. As Oscar says about networks:

⁴⁰ Precarious (dis)Connections (2011) *From precarious workers to precarity*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

[...] actually there are so many kind of very dirty and very conflictive and very not-so-clear relationships, and I kind of like to think about them as creating attrituses and creating dirt, against this idea of ‘well actually we are all similar’, so also in terms of circulation, in terms of smoothness, in terms of interchangeability...⁴²

Networks are not smooth spaces, but sites of tensions and power relations as much as other spaces. Beyond avant-gardist networking practices stemming from liberal education and creative industries, How to think precarity in relation to other territories and local support systems?

Precarity, the everyday and care

Precarity and care: a la deriva

An interesting example of struggles focusing around ‘precarity’ has been the Spanish Collective Precarias a la Deriva, constituted across fields such as care, sex and cultural work. Precarias had a strong focus around inventing a politics of care while sustaining an affinity with the EuroMayDay and other movements. They pointed to problematic patterns in the valorization of labour in Autonomist theory:

A dominant tendency in much neo-Marxist thought points to the emergence of so-called immaterial work (work which is affective, communicative, creative, linguistic, etc.). This work, which has to do with cognitive processes, production of knowledge, languages and links is not, despite what many analyses might suggest, homogenous. It is heavily marked by the social value assigned to the different kinds of work within this category, which is what establishes a difference between giving a hand-job to a client and designing a web page.

This is important for the debate, especially since all those questions which concern ‘reproduction’ -both in the strict sense, that is, domestic work and care (whether paid or not) and in a broad sense, such as communication, management, socialization, production of well-being, lifestyles, etc. [...] - generally remain in the shadows.⁴³

⁴² Interview with Oscar, London, April 2011.

⁴³ Precarias a la Deriva (2004) *The Picket-Survey*. Makeworlds Journal.

The way in which connections between different modes of labour are established is a delicate point. It requires giving attention to the experiential and existential horizons and bodies of people before making any generalizing claims about their status or subjectivity as workers. It is not self-evident what ‘work’ means across different spectrums of status and industry, as I have explored in previous chapters. Differential experiences of migration and employment play into this when subjects are sorted into so-called low and high skill, documented or illegal, temporary or stable categories of work/life: precarity can mean a number of combinations across these categories. The experience of migration obviously plays into this in a substantial way, since it is where a gap between creative-type labour and care-work becomes visible. The displacements of people for doing creative labour, while not necessarily less precarious than those of migrants setting off to do care work abroad, do concern a generally different population (more educated, more located near the global north) than that of care labour⁴⁴ (people with few qualifications, coming from the ‘third’ or at least ‘second’ world).

Precarias a la Deriva saw the importance of creating bridges between different forms of precarization and ‘work’ – particularly in the face of the dominant neoliberal politics around care and creativity, which were also key sites of struggle around what comes to be valued as ‘work’, and how such value may be thought – yet the tools for building it were yet to be invented. The collective proposed some models of action in correspondence with these divergent forms of experience, articulating their commonalities and differences through what they called ‘drifts through the circuits of feminized labour’⁴⁵ – (homes, offices, streets, etc.), picket-surveys (imagining precarious variants of ‘striking’⁴⁶, based on their urban territory).

These formats and the way Precarias theorized them had considerable resonance across European spheres of Precarity-organizing (within but also beyond the MayDay movements), as many groups were experimenting with ways of combining research and action in this field. Militant research⁴⁷ came to be one key dispositif for imagining situated forms of knowledge production that would lead into action and solidarity. The

⁴⁴ As Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra interestingly point out in a similar comparative analysis of the work of city traders and that of care workers, see Neilson, Brett and Mezzadra, Sandro (2007): *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labour*, [Transversal Webjournal](#).

⁴⁵ Precarias a la Deriva (2004) *Adrift through the circuits of feminized precarious work*, [Transversal webjournal](#).

⁴⁶ Precarias a la Deriva (2004) *The Picket- Survey*.

⁴⁷ See Colectivo Situaciones (2003) *On the researcher militant*. [Transform Webjournal](#).

format of the ‘picket-survey’ is one example of collectively inhabiting the space-times of feminized work, invented as an alternative form of strike for those who could not abandon their site of work because they were their own boss (self-employed, home-based workers) or because the lives of other depend on them (mothers, carers).

Collectively walking through such spaces of work (thus drifting across homes, streets, shops...) and using the survey (a set of questions about women’s precarious work and life) as a way of spurring conversations and producing knowledges, this was a way of turning the strike into an occasion for co-research and self-questioning.

That first picket-survey of June 20th, which was limited though very inspiring, gave way to a new project of interpellation based on displacement, that is to say, the possibility of preparing and carrying out a series of itineraries which would cross through the diverse metropolitan circuits of female precariousness. Thus, against the habitual division of life and work, a division long questioned by feminism, we opted for a research practice that would attend to the spatial/temporal continuum of existence and the experience of the double (or better, multiple) presence as a subjective transposition or, as the Situationists would say, as a technique of uninterrupted passage through diverse physical and psychic environments.⁴⁸

For a ‘strike’ of informal, unwaged work cannot look like industrial action, since the lives of others hinge on such informal care. The concept of a ‘caring strike’ or ‘care strike’ has circulated in militant feminist circuits around the Eskalera Karakola Social Centre in Madrid, where the Precarias were based, but also well beyond. As Marcela, an activist within the Feminisms Commission of Sol, the initial 15M Camp, tells me of their attempts to stage caring strikes:

On the 14th of November [2012] there’s a general European Strike, and our idea is to participate in this with what we call the ‘strike of care’, to show that domestic work is also work, and that women as such must also struggle for their rights, just as much as the miners and teachers are taking to the street. Women dedicate themselves to care, like nannies, and yet many women have never worked for pay, so here they should affirm this right and do a symbolic strike. The idea is not that they stop caring for the sick, children or persons that can’t

⁴⁸ Precarias a la Deriva (2004) *The Picket-Survey*.

do certain things by themselves, but that they don't shop or cook food for their husbands as a symbolic means to show what happens when women stop their work. If we all stop then the economy, which is sustained by caring labour... if there are no women who iron, wash, cook then there are no men coming to their workplaces at 7am in perfect shape. So based on this we'll do informative pickets, we'll go to the streets with rubber gloves, affirming and telling that women too have the right to strike, or should have it...⁴⁹

Feminismos Sol, just like Precarias a la Deriva (and, with more of a specific focus on migrant care work in the home, related groups such as Territorio Domestico⁵⁰) seeks to bring together women of different ages, color and class backgrounds to jointly reflect on reproductive work and to develop joyful and innovative ways of organising around them. How can a migrant cleaner and a young designer discover their commonalities, how can they support each other? Many modes of solidarity and shared reference and interpellation were proposed by the Precarias, such as their collective drifts. These formats and the way Precarias theorized them had much resonance across Europe and beyond, where other groups were equally experimenting with ways of combining research and action⁵¹. After 2005, the 'Precarias' dissolved and its collaborative ties took different directions.⁵²

Missing compasses

Political vocabularies, formats, concepts and tools help us address and analyse our conditions. Particularly in a period that was by many perceived as one of impasse⁵³ – of being unable to articulate a potent political position on the basis of lived realities, of rapid transformation and definite loss of subjective/identitarian compasses – a

⁴⁹ Interview with Marcela, Madrid, November 2012. My translation from Spanish. I published part of this interview in the following article: Zechner, M. (2012) *Prekarietaet ist das Verhuetungsmittel der Zukunft – Interview mit feministischen Aktivistinnen des 15M*. In: *Malmoe* Nr.61, Winter 2012, Wien.

⁵⁰ A Madrid based group emerging partly out of the experience of Precarias a la Deriva, working around domestic labour. See this video to get a sense of the composition of such initiatives: Cinemacopains (2010) *Video documenting the demonstration on the international day of domestic workers*, 28th of March, organized by Territorio Doméstico, Sedoac, Cita de Mujeres de Lavapiés, Agencia de Asuntos Precarios, Escalera Caracola and supporters, Madrid.

⁵¹ See for example the Micropolitics Research Group (2009) Seminar on 'Militant Research', which brought together a set of European political groups working on precarity.

⁵² Amongst them 'mutating towards the construction of a laboratory of female workers, called the 'Todas a Cien' Agency for Precarious Matters, with its headquarters in the women's public space, Eskalera Karakola', as a footnote to a recent short text by them specifies: Precarias a la Deriva (2009) *Political bodies vs. Bodies Politic*, published in *Turbulence Webjournal*.

⁵³ See Colectivo Situaciones (2009) *'Disquiet in the Impasse'*, *Turbulence Webjournal*.

proliferation of formats, concepts and tools was needed to move out of the darkness.⁵⁴ ‘Precarity’ came to be a key point of anchorage for many such experiments, in attempts to articulate trans-class and trans-border political subjectivities.

The interconnection between domestic, sex, migrant and creative labour that the Precarias a la Deriva proposed was an attempt to forge a link between globalised landscapes of labour and everyday realities. Precarity is no doubt one of the most pertinent key words for a ‘rethinking of the very notions we use to describe and analyse the current hierarchization and spatialization of labour’⁵⁵ and thus for imagining a non-homogenizing common lens shared by different struggles. Acknowledging and developing ‘precarity’ as a political concept that can give rise to differential practices – such difference and multiplicity being inevitable rather than coincidental – allows for the letting go of a certain nominalism that perhaps persisted in some precarity-based struggles.

As an ex-member of Precarias a la Deriva, remembers about this group and their work around precarity: ‘... we believed in a certain nominalism; that if you give things names, then things exist’⁵⁶. A certain performative way of thinking politics, forging speech acts that impact on lived realities. The insistence on the term precarity and the efforts to institute transversal connections across different realities have indeed been performative to the extent that it has carved out a field of discourse and practice that formerly didn’t exist. At the same time it is also in relation to a somewhat voluntaristic attitude that some Ex-Precarias remember the limits to transversal precarity organising:

On the one hand, we thought that naming things would allow for their immediate transformation; on the other, we thought that if we filled precarity with potency, joy and desire, we would connect to people’s experience from a different side. Neither happened. We ran up against the proliferation of infinite narratives, dispersion and the difficulty of delimiting a territory: an experience that seemed impossible to take in and didn’t become translated into new rights or new spaces. Besides, our ‘positive’ idea of precarity didn’t connect with the

⁵⁴ See also Turbulence Collective (2007) *Move into the Light: Postscript to a turbulent 2007*, [Turbulence Webjournal](#).

⁵⁵ Neilson, B. and Rossiter, N. (2008), *Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception*. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2008; 25; Sage Publishers.

⁵⁶ Interview with Fatimatta, London, July 2011.

social malaise. Paradoxically, we started idealising others. We threw ourselves into concrete alliances and lost along the way the ‘starting from oneself.’

In a way, the alternative to classic politics, ideologies, ready-made formulas, was to be found in others more than in ourselves: we failed to successfully articulate the starting from oneself with the encounter with others, and fell into the gap between life and politics, between experience, the body and the idea. On one side, the proper thing, what is done with (and for) others, the truly political. But, in separating life – the other side – from politics, politics becomes, materially and affectively, unsustainable. And an encounter without bodies is an abstract, unreal idea.⁵⁷

How to build affiliations not on the basis of theories but of shared spaces, contradictions and conversations? To focus on names can be to speak for others instead of speaking with/to them, and to ignore one’s actual environment and relations in favour of an ideal political project. Questions around representation are at the core of this impasse: how to imagine precarity coming to be a conceptual tool that allows groups to organise politically, without assuming a central coordination of these struggles? There was a clear desire to avoid large-scale representation in favour of syndicated and more situated movements, holding together in a network (which eventually would have its institutions of the commons and its more formal alliances). Guy Standing perhaps misjudges this attitude towards representation as naïve:

It was a liberation of the mind, a consciousness of a common sense of insecurity. But no ‘revolution’ comes from simple understanding. There was no effective anger yet. This was because no political agenda or strategy had been forged. The lack of a programmatic response was revealed by the search for symbols, the dialectical character of internal debates, and tensions within the precariat that are still there and will not go away.⁵⁸

While trying to avoid a ready-made, programmatic response, clearly EuroMayDay does aim to link and coordinate struggles and actions: an attempt at imagining and multiplying platforms for coordination and solidarity. It appears not to be blindness to a

⁵⁷ Precarias a la Deriva (2009) *Political bodies vs. Bodies Politic*.

⁵⁸ Standing, G. (2010) The Precariat.

programmatic perspective but rather a perhaps excessive focus on platforms and networks themselves that comes to limit possibilities for solidarity and shared struggle. What does it take for a ‘we’ to emerge and make sense? My assertion here is that the answer is something to do with the body, with intimate relations, places and care.

Self-referentiality and transversality

In a neo-liberal context that leaves everyone competing on their own – despite increasingly tapping into discourses and technologies of collectivity – the investment of energies into imagining and forging transversal connections is a vital attempt at resisting self-enclosedness, isolation and individualization (and the cynicism and depression that come with those). The neoliberal social is segregated according to professions, age, ethnicity, etc. The commercialization of public space and services mean that there are fewer platforms for exchange across the borders and filters that governance sets out. In workplaces and institutions, new techniques of management increasingly inhibit conversation and conflict.

The mode of capitalism that puts life to work (as affectivity, collaboration, sociality, care, creativity...) produces so-called specialists or experts instead of just workers. The neoliberal job market captures desire in mimicking firm occupational identities⁵⁹ whilst actually multiplying as well as producing regimes of free labour: endless training, updating, managing and volunteering that happen during non-work hours. If life as well as work are the objects of exploitation in the biocapitalist nexus, how can we imagine a differential affirmation of them? In how far does the framework of ‘precarity’ function in enunciating a new way of relating not just to work but also to life?

This thesis proposes that care, as a practice of giving attention to life-in-common and thus sustaining it via labour-in-common, can help us go about (defining/doing) work, life and politics differently. Where precarity-movements affirmed other ways of collaborating in the face of a becoming-meaningless of work, recent responses to the crisis resist the capitalist capture of life with an affirmation of other modes of conviviality, reproduction and mutualism. Where avant-gardist political networks often end up caught in self-referentiality, across the dimensions of care and territoriality we can re-imagine networks as inhabited by fragile, strong, moving and resting bodies.

⁵⁹ See The Economist, Schumpeter Column (2010) *Who's the Manager here? Inflation in job titles is approaching Weimar levels*. Economist website, print edition of June 26th 2010.

Caring politics

In recent articulations of the crisis, there has been a shift from a political practice based around discursivity towards one happening in the square, workplace, street, home, etc. A month or two after the movement of the 15th of May erupted in Spain (and beyond) in 2011, it seemed that a new way of doing politics had emerged from the *acampadas* and assemblies: ‘now it is more about just being there, supporting, sustaining, doing...’.⁶⁰ Care takes a new importance in this practice, and so does the respect for others (as both Fatimatta and Marga emphasize, the coordination around ‘care’ came to be called the coordination around ‘respect’ eventually⁶¹). To think in the long term, to sustain a space of collectivity and life, to lend mutual support and to pay attention to others were key during the weeks and months following 15th May.

Some months after that still, in November 2011, after a camp and many assemblies emerged around St. Paul’s cathedral and Finsbury Square in London, a similar development is echoed in the summary of some of the events concerning potential eviction of the camp. Hannah Borno, a protester from the camp, in a Commentary in the *The Guardian*⁶² describes why the City of London Corporation intends to clear tents from around St.Pauls: ‘Their reasons include the fact that "vulnerable people" have been drawn to the camp and they also worry about the impact of the camp on local businesses.’ She goes on to elaborate on this reasoning:

[...] ‘vulnerable people’ was their language. It is an interesting angle to engage in here and reflects the fact that ‘health and safety’ won’t work [as a legal basis for evicting campers] as we are very well run and match all requirements. However, it is understandable that with a camp that is so well run, with people who genuinely care about others and with free food etc. then many people who are homeless, have drug or alcohol problems or suffer mental health issues would be drawn to visit. What is remarkable about the camp is that on a daily basis, many of these people have told us that they have never felt so welcome, so cared for and so listened to in their lives.⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview with Fatimatta.

⁶¹ See interviews Fatimatta and Marga.

⁶² Borno, Hannah (2011), ‘OccupyLondon faces eviction: Q+A on how to proceed’, published in ‘Comment is Free’ in the *Guardia*, 15th November 2011.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The preoccupation with mutual support and everyday solidarities that this wave of initially camp- and assembly-based movements reflects may be seen as situational to some extent: on the one hand, mutual care takes on a vital function in the context of austerity, where more and more people come to be made ‘vulnerable’ (as neoliberal language puts it, evading terms such as ‘poor’ or ‘precarious’ in favour of a personalizing rhetoric). People again perceive that they have immediate need of one other to survive: a certain spell of abstraction and outsourcing heteronomy to other places and spaces has been broken. On the other hand, as spaces of everyday coexistence, camps cannot do without developing a whole range of sensitivities and protocols around caring for and respecting each other’s boundaries, needs and situations.

Yet the camp has emerged as a predominant form of protest also in response to the disappearance of shared common spaces, to the privatisation of space and the individualisation of people via the neoliberal obsessions with competition, efficiency, management and profit. There was thirst for conviviality, even a messy one: coming into contact with other people, their very needs, bodies and problems. A need to find back one’s body and voice in a mess of networks, names, normativities, cuts, protests and states of exception. Care and respect emerge as important coefficients of these very local yet globally networked struggles against capitalism. They fly in the face of neoliberal discourses and technologies of care and collectivity that seek to control and divide the social (the ‘Big Society’ of David Cameron, for instance, see section C) in new pastoral fashion.

Care and creativity in everyday life

The urgency of inventing ways of being together with solidarity and trust, escaping loneliness and isolation and finding new modes of caring for others both on the local and the global scale resonates far beyond the protest camps of 2011. If camps at one point embody this urgency, the challenge concerning social movements as much as their beyond is that of imagining and inventing other modes of organising care in the everyday. Creativity becomes meaningful again in the face of such a challenge, beyond its neoliberal instrumentalization by capital – and it enters into direct correlation with care.

What the organisational models I am speaking about have in common is a culture of

starting from themselves in their political as well as labour practice, building on shared modes of living, working and organizing politically. The division between life and politics that Precarias a la Deriva speak about above reminds of the division of work and life I have spoken about in earlier chapters – indeed these mutually constitute each other. Life is always the excluded term in these nexuses, not considered ‘productive’, secondary. The challenge of new organizational forms is to find ways of addressing and instituting ‘life’ beyond the rhetorical.

This is a question not just of showing how life itself is political (as feminist movements in and beyond the 1970s did) but also of inventing ways of engaging politics otherwise. Some precarity-related politics still remained quite oriented towards production (of actions, tools and visibility), cultivating ‘juvenile bodies’ (Fatimatta) and hyperactive rhythms of life, accessible only to young, flexible and technology-savvy people.

I also remember a conversation with Colectivo Situaciones, in which I told them ‘we have to politicize life’, that the political has to come from the politicization of life, and they said – something I didn’t understand in that moment – that we also have to vivify politics. And it is when politics becomes hyper-militant in the sense of putting only the public and visible into the center, it becomes desertified... and it generates very rigid bodies... and by invisibilizing all that which reproduces communities, it ends up reducing them and drying them out.⁶⁴

To invent a common, not to say to take care of its reproduction, is difficult, maybe today more than ever. Moving on to the question of new forms of alliance and organising across precarious work, many challenges present themselves. One of them concerns finding common references and relations across work-lives that share little cultural or social interconnections. It is not just workplaces or job types that differ broadly across precarious forms of work, but it is also the forms of everyday life. Yet at the same time as producing dispersal and individualization, precarity also produces new shared conditions such as work-related illnesses, particularly in relation to stress, anxiety and depression. This is the ‘other’ side of affective labour and post-Fordist cooperation, and an aspect increasingly addressed by political collectives: illness and the body as departure point for shared organising. In the Precarious Workers Brigade’s

⁶⁴ Interview with Fatimatta.

Peoples Tribunal on Precarity, for instance, ‘Illness and the body’ featured as one of the key categories according to which cases of precarious work were presented and investigated⁶⁵: a case of repetitive strain injury was presented by an overworked teaching on permanently temporary contracts, and the effects of enforced silence at work were presented by another precarious worker.

In a reading of forms of valorization of work under biocapitalism, Cristina Morini argues that ‘Precarity – the enslavement of the body-mind that precarity induces – surely plays an important role in canalizing the element of affect towards work’⁶⁶. Biocapitalism – the mode of capitalism that puts life to work, in its dimensions of affectivity, collaboration, sociality as well as of care and creativity – builds on a blurring of life and work whereby more and more activity enters the market and becomes ‘productive’ without however getting paid. Only in the seemingly limitless processes of accumulation that post-industrial capitalism brings does precarity emerge as a liminal state of existing between remuneration and free work, between a threat of poverty and the semblance of success/recognition. ‘Work’ indeed takes on a different meaning in this context, with a lot of affect channelled towards it, since it comes to constitute – in a murky, informal, undefined way – our primary way of valuing what we do, that is, of valuing our ‘life’. A politics that wants to affirm life in a way different from biocapitalism thus also needs to deal with work.

In the context of biocapitalism, the prisms of care and creativity may be more useful for redefining ‘work’ and ‘life’. Between precarious work and the labours of reproduction and care, new spaces for experimentation have opened up since the beginning of the current cycle of crises in 2008. If a generation of people came to politics in passing via the movement of movement towards EuroMayDay, a moment with an exploding sensitivity around invention and intervention, there seems to now be a shift from the politics of creative intensity towards one that works around the limits of bodies more concretely. While this is certainly to do with the current moment being one where the very bases of life are under attack, as welfare and social rights are dismantled at vertiginous speeds, it also coincides with a generational shift in the groups and people at

⁶⁵ ...alongside the categories ‘Institutional precarity’, ‘Work and contracts’ and ‘Migration’. See Precarious Workers Brigade (2011) *Opening text*, in: *Precarity: a people’s tribunal*.

⁶⁶ Morini, C. (2010). *El trabajo de cuidado como arquetipo del biocapitalismo*. *Swarm Webjournal*.

stake in this thesis in this thesis. A sensitivity that follows on from many years of networked precarity organising appears to concern the importance of care networks, common infrastructures and sustainable practices, as Pantxo points out in an interview:

I think it was also part of a becoming adult, a minor becoming adult, [...] somehow I think when you turn to your thirties, you have to think about... you start to feel that you are going to be there for a long time still... that your life is gonna be longer... that your life project needs to be articulated on the possibility of a becoming old... [...] I would say that in that moment we would start to think about the fact that we were becoming old – also because my parents were becoming old, that dimension of weakness being part of your life, mutual support being part of the possibility of living somehow– started to be a problem somehow. I mean the problem was not just how a political collective could hold its own crisis; but how I can live my crisis without assuming a static subjectivity? How can I be precarious... how can I live the freedom of precarity?⁶⁷

Freedoms of precarity: refusing accumulation?

Indeed the freedom of precarity may point less to a nostalgic idea of poverty than to a strategy for survival as well as a refusal of accumulation. As Andreas Exner and Brigitte Kratzwald say in their book about commons and solidarity-based economies, the choice of building commons against the competitive building of careers is an ethical as well as political one, and there is much commoning going on in the worlds of precarity. Exner and Kratzwald refer to the historical example of paupers on the British Isles at the dawn of capitalist development in the 17th century, who resisted enclosures and the new division of commoning and subsistence into wage labour (for men) and reproductive work (for women):

The struggles against [the conversion of people into wage and reproductive labourers] influenced the direction of capitalist development and forced capital towards ever-new compromises and concessions. The mass poverty that occurred at this moment was not just, as if often claimed, a necessary historical transition phase towards industrial development, but it was also a form of resistance against expropriation and forced labour. This phenomenon of mass

⁶⁷ Interview with Pantxo, July 2011, London.

poverty, then called 'pauperism', not only referred to a situation of economic lack but stood for 'antisocial' behaviour par excellence, for a mobility and independence that rejected the submission to social normativisation. Pauperism showed that by far not all people were willing to submit to the logics of waged and reproductive work, to accept this limitation of their liberties and to take on the new 'civilised' manners, and that many people were seemingly not interested in 'improving' their life situation and taking on the needs that economists ascribed to them.⁶⁸

In perceiving such agency in an age of transition towards new forms of accumulation, may we see some parallels to the current phase of neoliberalism and the phenomenon of mass precarization? As capitalism transforms, it enters into crisis not least because it encounters resistance from people who refuse to take on the new means of value extraction that capitalist change implies. We may say that precarity entails not just the power of refusing the wage and of creating modest commons that tie together life and work in less alienated ways, but also of inventing ways of commoning in the urban neoliberal realms. If the current crises of capitalism signal the shift towards accumulation that touches upon the most intimate spheres of human interaction, cooperation and life, then may the current massification of precarity be seen as a broad resistance to the capture and measure that neoliberal capitalism entails? Following from this, what happens to such resistance as we shift from entrepreneurialism to neo-communitarianism, into yet another world of value extraction? This latter shift is what I witness in this thesis, as an on-going process.

In sections B and C, I will work through some instances of collective practice that sit within the nexus of care and creativity, within precarious contexts of self-organisation and militancy, dedicating a series of chapters to the network form and its relation to precarious lives and work. The questions of the non/valorisation, in/visibility, in/formality and precariousness of work that I have addressed in relation to labour markets and economics in this chapter, will now be shifted and translated towards the domains of self-organisation, where they manifest themselves through a host of more micropolitical matters as concerning the ethics and politics or practice. The big question, 'how to organise the unorganisable, the fragmented, the dispersed' that arises

⁶⁸ Kratzwald, B. and Exner, A. (2012) *Commons und Solidarische Oekonomie*. Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag. p.51. My translation from German.

in relation to precarity and informal work will be addressed in relation to the specific associational form of the network in what follows, as concerning post-Fordist work, care work, migrant labour and also the family.

Having thus explored complexities around configurations of work as they stand after the 1970s, we have arrived at some of the problems and limitations that not just speaking, but also organising around labour implies – particular in view of transversal struggles. We have seen that the precarity-based organising of the years around the millennium has tended to emphasise creativity, while since the mid-2000s questions around care have taken up considerable space. As the social, financial and ecological crises erupting today bring new challenges for social movements, precarity-organising is entering a new phase: the proposal of this thesis is to critically analyse and engage those through the lens of care and creativity in networked social movements.

Across this critical examination of creativity in post-Fordist contexts, which led us to a similarly critical intuition around contemporary care, there has at the same time been an emphasis that that creativity and care may in fact be co-constitutive of one another, in the face of the enabling vulnerability that social movements want to accentuate across precarity. Following up on the contradictions and potentials this implies, we will now pay closer attention to the specific ways in which networks enable and constrain strategies and micropolitics of precarity, and shape new configurations of unpaid and non-waged work.

SECTION B: NETWORKS, MOVEMENTS,
ORGANISATION

Introduction to section on Networks and Organization

Section A departed from an analysis of work, its discourses and configurations, towards an analysis of precarity and contexts of where militant, post-Fordist and care work overlap. Immaterial labour and precarity have widely been associated with networks in the post-Fordist and neoliberal paradigm. This section B poses the question of networks in relation to care, in looking across three different sites of networked organization: creative/knowledge economies, migration, and families. The key concept articulated in this section is that of ‘care networks’, a way of naming the new constellations of caring relation and social reproduction that appear in contexts of globalization and neoliberalism.

Another key concept emerging here is that of continuity, relating to contemporary forms of social dispersion and commoning notably, which have the question of continuity of relations and experiences at their heart. Dwelling on the productions of forms of care, association and knowledge across post-Fordist, migrant and familial networks, this section attempts to make some (transversal and intersectional) connections across different worlds of precarity, reproduction and migration.

As such, this section proposes different views on what ‘organized networks’ may be, and how depending on their locations along lines of geography, class, gender and race, networked subjects construct different kinds of decentralized and flexible organization. It investigates arrangements of work, life and relations across these different contexts of care, pointing to parallels and differences across them, in order to grasp the potentials for care networks to be seen as sites and agents of politics.

This section thus shifts from examining post-Fordist networks to considering their ‘blind spots’ in relation to care: contexts of migration and familial reproduction.

Touching upon possible alliances enabled by a politics of care/reproduction, it maps out new feminist approaches in social movements, and their relevance in the current age of crisis and austerity. As the role of the state and of self-organisation and -provision come to again be up for grabs in this moment, this section leads towards considerations about policy, as further elaborated later in Section C.

With Chapter B.1 we begin with an examination of the role of networks in contemporary economies, particularly looking at post-Fordist work and networked activisms, and some of the discourses stemming from there. Special attention here is given to how situatedness and embodiment play out in such contexts and may enable a politics of care. It deepens the interrogation of post-Fordist networks towards a micropolitical analysis of networked cultural production and collaboration, drawing on interview material to point to women's and militant's strategies for undoing neoliberal conditions of loneliness and competition and inhabiting networks otherwise.

In chapter B.1, building on perspectives of transnational families and care chains, the family enters as a figure of care network. Building on the preceding analysis of migration status and gender in transnational care chains, this chapter looks in more detail at families in relation to class and precarity. It asks what other models of care networks may be constructed in spaces of precarity, and proposes to look at the family in order to think this through. As such it draws on narratives of family as emerging from social movement and precarity networks. Here too the role of the state in promoting and shaping forms of family, mutual support and conviviality emerges more clearly.

In Chapter B.3, another modality of networking – that of migrants and nomadic subjects – serves to reflect and deflect conclusions drawn based on post-Fordist networks, attempting to take seriously the 'constitutive outside' of migration in relation to organized networks of post-Fordist economies. Questions of mobility, governance and rights enter here in showing how networks serve to work around the limitations and borders imposed by the state. The figure of the service worker and of migrant care workers appears here to illustrate ways of doing care and work across borders, in ambivalent spaces that as such still resemble those of murky post-Fordist precarity.

B.1 Post-fordism, militancy and reproduction: towards a micropolitics of organised networks

Networks and post-Fordist work

The advent of the Internet and digital information and communications technologies had a strong impact on the organisation and configuration of work: post-Fordist knowledge and creative economies emerge with the development of new digital tools and management techniques. An increasing focus on network cultures and their effects on labour, political organization and economy accompanies this: in business, research and policy, the network form came to be invested as a new model for accumulation and profit. Innovations in the use of networks stemmed from social movements, industry, policy and science/technology alike, with varying circuits of re/appropriation and contestation occurring across those.

‘Networking’ emerged as a key paradigm for efficient management in the 1990s, making people cooperate and self-organise at the same time as exposing them to isolation and competition. Yet networks can be used for many purposes and to many effects, and indeed both labour and capital draw on them to combat one another. The point here is to neither assume their total subsumption by capital nor their purity and horizontal innocence, but to look at the tensions and contestations that underlie them. In this sense, this chapter explores different ways of approaching networks in relation to post-Fordist labour. While many network discourses (particularly the systemic and abstract ones, with few links to social conflicts) fail to address the differences between networking for social change and networking for profit, or to recognize networks as contested spaces at all, some more political theorists have tried to look critically towards the ‘grounds’ of network techniques in management as well as the social. The

work of Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski did just that, and was received with interest in contexts of organisation where the need for other and more critical network genealogies made itself felt:

At that point [following the noughties] there were two French theorists called Boltanski and Chiapello, who said more or less *that*: that the network came from the whole explosion of 68, from the singularity of desires, desires of insubordination towards authoritarian institutions – and in some way, that the productive system had re-appropriated that in order to make us all more productive, which would correspond to the construction of the network economy, of post-Fordism, etc. From there, political collectives started to organize themselves in networks too, and Paolo Virno said ‘Well but that’s always been the case, that politics has to respond to the way in which the social organizes itself’. And that’s true... but it is also sure that connectionism was very marked by the individualism of desires. Connections established and maintained themselves as long as they were productive, otherwise they broke. And that was fine but it generates – as Boltanski and Chiapello said – a hierarchy of those who are mobile over those who are immobile. Those who have fewer possibilities to move and look for connections are all the more fragile within the network.¹

Across workplaces as well as campaigns, the neoliberal generalization of the network-form had not just enabled new relational and productive dynamics, but also produced instability, insecurity, informal hierarchies and empty discourses of participation, as well as a stark division between those who are economically mobile, those who are stuck in one place, and those who have to migrate to survive. A disenchantment with the network logic implies a disenchantment also with the notions of ‘adaptability, flexibility, polyvalence; sincerity in face-to-face encounters; ability to spread the benefits of social connections, to generate enthusiasm and to increase teammates’ employability²’ which Boltanski and Chiapello identified as defining a ‘state of greatness’ in a projects-based justificatory regime of contemporary business practices.

Our analysis has lead us to conclude that a new representation of the firm has

¹ Interview with Fatimatta.

² Chiapello, E. and Boltanski, L (2006) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Springer Science and Business Media p.169

emerged, featuring an organisation that is very flexible; organised by projects; works in a network; features few hierarchical levels; where a logic of transversal flows has replaced a more hierarchical one, etc.³

Boltanski and Chiapello define the way the key modes of *excitement*, *fairness*, and *security* play out in the neoliberal network or projects-based model⁴: these three criteria need to be answerable in order for people to actively opt into a system such as capitalism, to be able to justify themselves in doing it, Boltanski and Chiapello say.

In my coordinate system, I use *creativity* and *care* to map out different configurations of, and attachments to, net/work(s). If in the neoliberal model, creativity corresponds to excitement and care to security, then I might ask in relation to social movements: how have they oriented themselves within and across the network logic and its practices, in particular in relation to precarity and post-Fordist work, and moved between affective intensity as well as stability? The hype of creativity in networks seems to largely have passed today, generating little excitement, yet new ways of relating to affect are underway as new forms of mass protest grip the European territory. Equally, there is hardly talk about fairness and security anymore in the contexts of austerity and unemployment (the pep talk of ‘we are all in this together’ has failed, as has the production of fear around terrorism, at least for now), and yet those terms – or less technicianist synonyms thereof – have been at the heart of movements such as the 15M and Occupy. How do movements re-inscribe care and creativity, and turn networks into tools and spaces for the production of other worlds?

My attempt at mapping networks according to their capacity for creativity and care has the aim of making the relations and practices within tangible in their concreteness, and to see how within a context of crisis and precarity, excitement and security may be translated towards new modes of co-invention and care. To do this, I will look across the Alter-globalization and EuroMayDay movements and their use of networks, and then point to more recent feminist and postcolonial approaches to network politics.

³ Ibid, p.165

⁴ They sum the functioning of these categories up as follows. Excitement: ‘no more authoritarian chiefs; fuzzy organisations; innovation and creativity; permanent change’. Fairness: ‘new form of meritocracy valuing mobility; ability to nourish a network’. Security: ‘each project is an opportunity to develop one’s employability; for the mobile and the adaptable; companies will provide self-help resources; to manage oneself’. Ibid, p.165

A common problem across leftist-liberal network cultures and neoliberal ones concerns the dominance of disembodied, non-situated discourses that fail to give rise to practices that can address care (beyond humanist or transactional paradigms), creativity (beyond individualist or technology-based accounts) and collectivity (beyond opportunistic temporary assembly and inside/outside biases). In order to explore possible situated and embodied approaches to networked collectivity, associational practice and subjectivity, I will be bringing together some different strands of network theory across this section B.

In this chapter, I revisit some such discourses (mostly articulated from a viewpoint of paid or immaterial work, often proposed by male scholars), and bring in feminist voices that reflect on them and take them further. As such, my reflection on networks here moves between considerations about labour, organising and everyday life as based on embodied and relational accounts of experience.

Networked organisation and work: discourses of the information age

Network discourses emerged in the 1970s and 80s, as the internet contributed to a beginning restructuring of industrialized societies and their international relations, marking a process that is often also referred to as ‘globalization’; the global networking of business, society and culture. Digital infrastructures affected relations between people, institutions, markets, governments, nations, and so forth, structuring their communications according to the speedy and decentralised protocols of the Internet. Various strands of theorization of this ‘networked’ age emerged, from more sociological to ontological approaches as well as from science and technologically focused to social movement related approaches.

For instance, the notion of a ‘network’ society emerged in the 1990s, with sociological theorizations like those of Manuel Castells⁵ analyzing what he calls ‘information

⁵ To Castells, ‘network’ is the central figure via which to understand the development of capitalism between 70s and today. In his three-volume book on the ‘rise of the Network Society’, published in 1996, he points to the transformations of labour, its flexibilization and precarization, that emerge with this digital age, as well as the problems of self-identity it poses: the dispersed and melting ‘pot’ of globalization gives rise to new racist and identitarian tendencies, and a broader quest for self-value via new forms of identitarianism and consumerism. While theories of the information society underpin much of the work I am referring to here, I will not dwell on this notion here since it seems more fruitful to take relationality (rather than technology) as a focus of analysis in the context of my project – the aforementioned transformations raise problems beyond ‘information’.

society’; the transformations of life and labour brought about by new communications technologies, along with a new industrial paradigm (akin to what others call post-Fordism). Whilst a wealth of new approaches to analyzing sociality and collaborative relations have emerged from science and technology studies (such as Actor Network Theory), these usually stop at questions of work; and theories of networked labour in turn often stop at questions of the organisation of life.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) has been an important reference point for the spread and development of the notion of network. It emerged in the 1980s from science and technology studies, notably in France via Bruno Latour and Michel Callon. In a talk given in 2010, reflecting on the development of this theoretical strand, Latour says that ‘in its simplest but also in its deepest sense, the notion of network is of use whenever action is to be redistributed⁶’, describing networks as organisational, material as well as symbolic figures that change how we perceive a situation or phenomenon: ‘the notion of networks points to a transformation in the way action is allocated. [...] what was invisible becomes visible, what had seemed self contained is now widely redistributed.⁷’ Indeed the ‘redistribution of action’ that the current crisis and dismantling of state support structures implies goes with new waves of networked (self-)organisation. What genealogies and experiences do those draw upon?

Many have preferred to speak of *network cultures* rather than of the more sociological term ‘actor-networks’, since the performativity of networks is often seen through the lens of voluntaristic intervention and action, while what gives many networks their consistency are shared cultures and common notions. What’s more, the cultures grounding networked organising to a large extent determine the possibilities of new forms of ‘action’ today, and it is particularly feminist visions that turn out to be promising in this respect, beyond the era of speculative creativity and creative activism.

The positivism of action-centered approaches comes to appear doubly problematic in the context of a neoliberal affirmation of activity. As Boltanski and Chiapello point out, ‘activity’ is a core value in neoliberal managerial cultures, and it is not by chance that the network speaks to those so much. The ‘juvenile’ (Fatimatta), flexible and

⁶ Latour, B. (2005) *Reflections of an actor network theorist*, in: *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford University Press, p.2

⁷ Ibid, p.3

replaceable bodies that networks require and produce have a hard time ageing, find it difficult to see themselves as part of a collective body that requires care. The languages and practices of ‘activism’ that mirror this neoliberal attitude are often no less voluntaristic, trying to solve problems without building common grounds. Neoliberal activity and voluntarist activism have the ignorance of reproductive dimensions in common. As reproduction becomes key to understanding and acting in the crisis, a new paradigm emerges to redistribute the meaning of action, of work and association (as slowly emerges in the course of this thesis), building on everyday cultures as much as on the making of new connections.

An early pointer in the direction of other ways of looking at networks is the notion of *network culture*, stemming from critical Internet cultures of the 1990s. Speaking of a desire to understand and further develop ways in which people collaborate and interact via digital information and communications technologies, such theories look at the ways of relating, working, speaking and producing that emerge from peer to peer culture. Geert Lovink, an internet/media theorist and founding director of the *Institute for Network Cultures* in Amsterdam, argues that ‘culture’ is not to be understood in the reductive sense of the creative industries model – as commodity – in this instance, but as resource, wherein forces are mobilized and things invented⁸. He draws on Hardt and Negri’s emphasis on the network model as in their book *Multitude*:

[...] the network has become a common form that tends to define our ways of understanding the world and acting in it. Most important from our perspective, networks are the form of organization of the cooperative and communicative relationships dictated by the immaterial paradigm of production.⁹

The insistence on the immaterial and digital is still strong here, but a certain focus on the concept of ‘collaboration’ opens onto concrete case studies of hacker culture and

⁸ Thus the point of view with Lovink’s approach of ‘network culture’ is one more from the inside of collaborative spaces – as for example also in Tiziana Terranova’s and Ned Rossiter’s works amongst others. The three theorists mentioned have mutually influenced each others’ work and developed some concepts in parallel, such as that of ‘network culture’. (Lovink is also one of the key figures in developing the concept of ‘organised networks’). See for instance: Terranova, T. (2004), *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, and Rossiter, N. (2006). *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam and the Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam.

⁹ Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2004) *Multitude*, New York, Penguin, p.142. See also: Loovink, Geert (2005), *The Principle of Notworking*, talk given at the Hoogeschool von Amsterdam, Network Cultures Website, page 8.

networks of post-Fordist work, which help ‘ground’ the network a little in social and political terms. Not only do networks become tangible as sites of work (and indeed also as key dispositifs in the transformation of work) in these theorizations, but they also come to be thought as spaces of concrete practice. The Institute for Network Culture has produced itself as platform not just for theorizing but for questioning and developing practices of digital collaboration, with a strong connection to creative workers and activists. The situated ways of thinking and practicing networks coming from there gave many impulses to social movements: an example of many is the WinterCamp of 2009¹⁰, where this institution brought together dozens of different militant and cultural groups to share and discuss how they work, and develop anti-copyright and anti-capitalist strategies in common.

In the context of network cultures, ‘collaboration’ is a term that has fuelled not only understandings of what it can mean to work, but also to be a political actor and to relate to others. In politically radical accounts of collaborative creativity, collaboration¹¹ is distinct from the smooth, managerialist concept of ‘cooperation’, seen as autonomous and beyond measure, based in a multiplication of desires and interests. Underlying the enthusiasms of radical collaboration was the principle of infinite reproduction: the fact that digital information can be copied and shared without end, beyond the principles of scarcity and property: a new paradigm of production and circulation that seemed incredibly promising. Echoing the ‘there’s no limit’ of the 1990s, certain affirmations of collaboration were seen as an opening away from rigid and ideological organisational cultures – and in affirming that radical self-interest underpins networked collaboration, they tried to undo what with Miranda Joseph¹² we may call ‘romantic’ communitarianism and a new wave of NGOism at the start of the millennium. Yet again reproduction and the body were not included in this consideration: what applies to bits of data hardly translates to bodies and relationships, whose energies and resources (if not desires and ideas) are situated and as such limited.

Organised Networks

Following and drawing upon new affirmations of networked collaboration and economy is the concept of ‘organised networks’, which operates a subtle shift beyond the notions

¹⁰ Wintercamp 2009, see blog of Institute for Network Cultures Amsterdam.

¹¹ Schneider, F. (2006) *Collaboration*. Two texts with the same title are published at summit.kein.org and kit.kein.org

¹² See Joseph, M. (2002) *Against the Romance of Community*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

of networks as spontaneous, wild and radically self-interested. Ned Rossiter dwells on this concept in a book¹³ published in 2006, positioning itself between and beyond the organizational models and discourses of networks, institutions and social movements in interesting ways (but still predominantly in relation to creative labour). A transversal concept designed to help understand not just the intersections but the very enmeshedness of formal and informal cultures and economies within and beyond markets. Rossiter insists that networks are in themselves economic entities, singular constellations of life and labour: reading his book through a feminist lens, we may see the ‘households’ and micro-economies in networks, perhaps even a feeling of networks as ‘home’. The orgnets project of 2007 sums up what Organized Networks are about:

- + new institutional forms that emerge within the social-technical culture of networks
- + non-representational technics of politics and governance
- + communication within networks is about relational processes not representational procedures
- + radically dissimilar to the moribund technics of modern institutional forms – or ‘networked organizations’ – such as governments, unions and firms whose logic of organization is predicated on vertical integration and representative tenets of liberal democracy
- + shift from the short-termism of tactical media to strategic development of trans-scalar sustainability¹⁴

The concept of ‘organised networks’ also springs out of an urgency to rethink labour, precarity and global governance through the network model: ‘the construction of unstable institutions or organized networks from which to contest the current waves of capitalist Development’¹⁵. How do we imagine political engagement within, across and beyond state and third sector institutions? Rossiter’s model tries to address this:

An organized network is one that instantiates the political in the moment of transversal engagement with seemingly antithetical institutional forms: the state,

¹³ Rossiter, N. (2006). *Organized Networks*.

¹⁴ See Orgnets Blog, ‘Concepts’ posted in June 2007 by *admin*.

¹⁵ Neilson, B. and Rossiter, N. (2008), *Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception* .

the firm, the NGO, the union, the university.¹⁶

In other words, the need for such a theorization of networked organisation is ‘partly conditioned by the crisis and, in many instances, failure of primary institutions of modernity (unions, firms, universities, the state) to address contemporary social, political and economic problems in a post-broadcast era of digital culture and society.’¹⁷

The longer-term is inscribed here as possibility: how to think a network as ‘new institutional form’¹⁸ and as ‘organised’? The concept-proposal of organised networks articulates how collective intelligence, creativity and desire are at work in self-organising practices, concepts and resources. It projects longevity and systematicity into the realm of digital collaboration: ‘Organised networks will increasingly be concerned with their own sustainability. Networks are not hypes. They may look temporary but are here to stay.¹⁹’ To build on cultures of collaboration, they need to envisage them in a longer term perspective, one that is able to recognize networks not as just co-working spaces but as those of life and care. If network time loops on itself without establishing longer circuits, it remains unable to reproduce life and build new institutions.

Alongside other projects of re-thinking institutions that took shape across Europe – see for instance the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies’ Issues on ‘Progressive Institutions’ (2007) ‘Monster Institutions’ (2008)²⁰ – Rossiter’s proposal reflects an increasing sensitivity to the crisis to come, based on the experiences of intensifying neoliberalism and precarity.²¹ The network here composes with the institution rather than relinquishing it: it is this perspective of longer temporalities and lasting forms of association that makes the ‘network cultures’ approach amenable to feminist perspectives. Networks are as minimally ‘natural’ as families or institutions, and in the context of capitalism they are as strongly shaped by its logic as everything else. The network paradigm for accumulation comes to be embodied in all kinds of contexts: while the next chapters will look at migration and the family in this respect,

¹⁶ Rossiter, N. (2009) ‘Networks, Institutions, Translation’, *Television & New Media*, 10(1): 138-140.

¹⁷ Rossiter, N. (2009) *Organized Networks: Questions of Politics, Translation and Time*, paper presented at ‘Out of the Blue’ event held at Blue House Amsterdam.

¹⁸ See also Rossiter, N. (2009) ‘Networks, Institutions, Translation’.

¹⁹ Loovink, G. (2005), *The Principle of Networking*.

²⁰ European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, Transversal Webjournal.

²¹ For another conceptual discussion of collaboration on the terms of ‘economies of contribution’, see Appendix 7 on the work of Bernard Stiegler.

this chapter continues to follow the thread of social movements and precarious post-Fordist work.

Networks and politics: from global resistance to interconnected labour²²

Networks did not just transform work, but also ways of organising, giving considerable impetus to social movements. If we rewind to the networked politics of the late 1990s and early 2000s, we see new forms of translocal alliance emerge, focusing around the opposition of meetings and policies of governing global elites. This had become possible through the mass use of digital networking technologies for coordination and dissemination of events as in the Reclaim the Streets movement, Anti-G8/G20 Protests and International Social Forums²³. The camps, occupations and parties that accompanied such counter-protests emerged as sites of lived solidarity and conviviality between different groups: network technologies made not only new transnational but also new forms of live relation possible.

In the Counter-summit camps, such as the 2007 protest against the G8 in Heiligendamm to which I will be referring below, ‘barrios’ of groups as diverse as Christian socialists, Queer and Transgender people, Anarchists, climate activists, and so forth shared resources and came together in regular meetings to discuss and coordinate actions, cook food and organise teach-ins and parties together²⁴. Even within the remits of short protest camps, this brought about a new notion of global solidarity and temporary cohabitation – rich spaces for getting to know and exchanging with others – but also a new affirmation of global interdependence and care. Frequently referred to as ‘Temporary Autonomous Zones’²⁵, these intensive spaces have been thought of as the lifeblood of a worldwide, networked movement proposing other ways of inhabiting globalisation. The ‘swarm’ was born as metaphor for the quick gathering of dispersed actors in a joint moment of intense mobilisation.

In conjunction with an increasing development of guerrilla uses of digital media, this movement of movements articulated a politics that moved beyond more traditional, hierarchical, local and identity-based forms of organisation. The key was to be found in

²² See Appendix 8 for Diagram of Networked Politics and Governance.

the network, with its strength in decentralization, rapid response and horizontality:

[...] [the global social movement] imposed a mass training to the use [sic], both practical and metaphorical (and, at times, rhetorical) of the networks; to the emergence of a dispersed, multicentric, always open to negotiation, concept of power; to temporary convergent actions, for specific purposes; to organisational galaxies and to multifaceted, ecological, living forms of rationality.²⁶

These dispersed, multicentric and temporary social gatherings also correspond to an increasing fragmentation of public space into various minor shared spaces (private, commercial or semi-public spaces destined for specific ‘publics’ or ‘users’) as well as to increasing social fragmentation through neoliberalism (flexibilisation of work, decentralised workplaces). These new dispersed geographies brought forth new ways of thinking about alliances and belongings, affirming intensive gatherings to counterbalance the gaps and disconnections produced by globalisation. A new way of thinking about distance and proximity emerged, as with the network there are more gaps than solid spaces, since the relations between actors may not be held together via local or bodily alliance. A floating relationality holds remote nodes together, as a ‘common’ that often remains hard to grasp.

Thus alongside great possibilities for collective imagination and action, globalization and networked politics were accompanied by new kinds of loneliness and isolation. Both unsettling and promising, it implied giving up the idea of consistent space as well as of a politics that covers everything. Across the new global territoriality and its disembodied online spaces, the camps and meetings were joyful moments of meeting, touching, eating, speaking, and intimacy. These spaces of convergence constituted vital spaces for feeling in community, but also carried an aftertaste of ghettoisation, given that subcultural groupings to a large extent prevailed and that this kind of global activist travel is a privilege. Such tensions resonates in what activist Simona says in an

²³ My account here is very condensed and limited to one instance of gathering. For a much more extensive genealogy of the context of networked movements in the 1990s and 2000s, referring to Spain and beyond, see Gil, S. (2012) Nuevos Feminismos.

²⁴ See for instance Lang, S. and Schneider, F. (2003): *The dark side of camping*, Makeworlds Journal.

²⁵ Bey, Hakim (1991 [1985]), The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism. New York: Autonomedia.

²⁶ Networked Politics presentation (2007), *Movements, networks and new forms of organisation*, Networked-Politics Blog.

interview at the counter-G8 camp at Heiligendamm in 2007:

[...] although the camps were occurring within the context of... a capitalist system and certain channels of food production, access and so on... I think that for a lot of people it was one of the times when they got to act on their beliefs and feel like that they were within a dominant culture, instead of in a counterculture isolated group... and it was empowering²⁷.

Apart from a powerful new culture of encounter and sharing, the emergence of a networked global anti-capitalist politics also provided promising alternatives to traditional forms of political representation and organisation (the parties and unions), creating a vibrant culture where life and politics intersected. In terms of social movements, this shakeup of affect, solidarity, self-education and collaboration is what grounds later developments of organised networks or network unionism. Without subscribing to a naïve notion of these new horizontalist movements and spaces devoid of power relations, structural inequalities, tensions and so forth, it is clear that the ethics of horizontality and globally networked struggle opened onto new worlds of collective knowledge production and action²⁸. Particularly for a generation of disenchanted youth who wanted to break with the cynicism and loneliness of global capitalism as much as with representative politics, the network era brought great excitement and learning.

Many years of intense mobilization, experimentation, solidarization and networking filled the years around the millennium, with this new movement and its network ethic growing beyond the counter-camps and protests towards the construction of militant webs dedicated to anything from the production of alternative media (Indymedia being the most well known example here), lobbying, cultural production, hacking and programming, the coordination of direct actions (EuroMayDay for instance, see the previous chapter), research and education²⁹, knowledge production and so forth. The first mass generation of young precarious knowledge workers had been born, and applied themselves to inventing other worlds: a multitude of platforms and networks for

²⁷ Future archive interview with Simona, conducted by A. Kanngieser and M. Zechner as part of the 'activist speech practices' research project within the future archive, June 2007. See future archive website.

²⁸ For examples of such practices, narratives and experiences see: Notes from Nowhere (2003), *We are everywhere*. Verso: London/New York.

²⁹ See for instance the Edu-Factory Project.

coordinating struggles emerged across the globe, framed in innovative ways through new information and communication technologies.

Strategies shifted from counter-protests to re-thinking labour, as global superpowers clearly weren't listening to mass protests in front of triple fences, and (police/army) repression increased. Organizing anti-summit gatherings came to appear problematic in many ways: consuming too much effort, operating on the logic of the state of exception, unable to generate sustainable models of conviviality and engagement with local contexts. Such global networking often failed to build sustainable and consistent cultures, and the often ephemeral ways in which space, place and constituents were engaged with reflected a certain 'spontaneity' that was too much like the voluntarism and opportunism of neoliberal work.

Precarity networks

Thus in the second half of the first millennial decade, a first reflective turn may be said to appear in relation to network politics: many activist took on the challenge of combining local with transnational organising, focussing from swarming and event politics onto work and communications. New collectives and networks emerged. On the one hand, the EuroMayDay movements begin to stir (with precarious creative workers forming groups like *Serpica Naro* [2005], *Creadores Invisibles* [2006], etc.), turning towards creative and knowledge labour as subject and object of organisation. On the other hand, more along the lines of an early exception, a first feminist turn in relation to precarity is operated by *Precarias a la Deriva* in Spain, building on the specific experiences of women in the network/post-Fordist generation. In this research, I follow the latter 'turn' as it echoes in contemporary movements that relate to crisis and austerity in view to feminism and commoning.

Across these developments from the alter-globalization movements, more attention was given to enabling global solidarities from where one was, focussing on generating alternative informative and communications infrastructures, transnational campaigns and strong local nodes. Groups began to orient themselves towards longer-term local initiatives, smaller transnational collaborations and their own constituencies and members, giving way to a turn towards collaboration and labour organising. The task at hand was to reengage labour organising as movement practice, beyond stratified institutions such as unions and parties – and envisaging the building of new

international networks and unions³⁰.

In the case of the EuroMayDay, inspiration was also drawn from the Reclaim the Streets movements and Carnivals against Capitalism, yet this time struggles were focused towards a European terrain, responding to EU restructurings of labour, economic and education policies (such as the adaptation of the Creative Industries model or the Bologna Process). Those promoted flexible, short term and precarious work and thus meant that precarious employment was on the rise across the continent. A text on the Galician ‘Universidade Invisibel’ network sums up the EuroMayDay’s analytical link between labour and networks:

We had a modern set of elements: Fordism – proletariat – factory – 1st of May. And we have then an updated proposal: Post-Fordism – precariat – Network – and again, 1st of May. [...] The network is not only the hegemonic form of production, but also the place in which Political Economy itself implodes, because in the network production more than anywhere else we can see the implosion of the productive labor/unproductive labor dichotomy, the time of work/time of leisure dichotomy, and consequently the implosion of the classical Theory of the Value and its measurements.³¹

The neoliberal network paradigm announced a new cycle of accumulation that was making itself strongly felt in industrialised countries. As ‘feminisation’ proceeded, the EuroMayDay increasingly gave way to smaller initiatives that tackled the very concrete conditions of local labour, education, migration and welfare struggles. This coincides with the advancement of fierce neoliberalism as well as the onset of financial crisis around 2008: most of the northern European precarity-related groups at stake here emerged as the pinch came to be felt in the wealthier economies too.

The notion of transnationally networked struggle remained pertinent to these local precarity groups, however as specific and limited collaborations rather than as networked mass movement. Throughout the different European mass mobilisations that

³⁰ Pillars of this movement are union experiment such as the transnational ‘Justice for Janitors’ campaign of SEIU; Via Campesina, the small farmers’ international; People’s Global Action; Jubilee 2000; Friends of the Earth, and many more.

³¹ Rota, A.F. de, (2008) *Euro May Day: An [sic] European Critical Recycling of the Left*. Universidade Invisibel online.

emerged since the onset of the crisis around 2008 – such as the student movements of 2009-2011, the 15M and Occupy movements – these local nodes of precarity organising prevailed and contributed as points of stability, continuity, resourcefulness and support. The context of social crisis infused them with new approaches to everyday politics, care and reproduction.

In the case of feminist turns in relation to the network model, as we will hear echoed later through interviews with ex-members of *Precarias a la Deriva* and similar groupings, there was a focus on embodied and concrete conditions of precarity as experienced in feminised everydays (which were arguably more pronounced in the European South), from early on. Women's conditions being already one step removed from factories, labour rights and one step ahead in terms of precarity, this new feminist methodology of organising also viewed transnationally networked movements from the viewpoint of the rather disconnected, invisibilised and culturally/economically undervalued everydays of care and reproduction.

Towards a micropolitics of networks

The following chapter part sums up some reflections on the effects that networks have on everyday lives and relations, drawing mostly on women's voices from the Spanish context. Even though alternative networking infrastructures had been put in place by movements, and different groups tried to activate questions around precarity in new ways, the loneliness and alienation produced by networked post-Fordism still made themselves felt in militant circles. In speaking to the women working on precarity in Spain and the UK, the desire and joy of reconnecting to bodies, emotions and spaces makes itself strongly felt. Without proposing a mere rejection of networks and related organisational experiments, how to speak about the potentials and limits of the network model in relation to work, organising and everyday life? What follows is a tentative at further establishing the 'grounding' of networks in everyday practices, via some micropolitical considerations.

Precarity, mobility and dispersion

In their first collective text of 2003³², *Precarias a la Deriva* describe some of the main axes along which they think and experience precarity: mobility, frontier territories,

³² *Precarias a la Deriva* (2003) *First Stutterings of Precarias a la Deriva*. [Makeworlds Journal](#).

corporealities, relations and knowledges, the logic of the firm, rent, and conflict. The interconnection between these terms may be contextualised in referring to the network form, as we have seen elsewhere: I will dwell on the first set of terms in the list here. Mobility, frontiers, territories, corporealities, relations and knowledges take on new dimensions in the network paradigm (as we will see below): one of the key features of this is perhaps the fact that these terms come to relate both to the dimension of the everyday and the global. There is a continuum between job mobility and geographical mobility, between intimate territories and geopolitical ones, between the body at work and in relation, between everyday knowledges and globally networked practices of knowledge production³³.

Mobility is the quality that best describes the current malleability of the labour force along the three axes: time, space and task. Mobility in the disposition of rhythms and schedules, mobility in the workplace and beyond that, in the geographic domain, in ones vital decisions, ones forms of life, as well as mobility of the functions or 'unit acts' and in the form of developing them, always subject to mutations, to processes of evaluation and adjustment, a constant auditing. Mobility as opposed to the old staticness, to bureaucratization and routine and, without a doubt, to the organizational capacity of persons who in any moment may find their functions modified and recombined, persons who don't know the limits of what they have to do, and in general, of what they themselves are.³⁴

The fact of welcoming new possibilities of movement – existentially, geographically and politically – comes with the ambivalent knowledge and feeling of being dislocated, lost, insecure. Precarity produces a permanent shifting between registers of local and global as well as between work and life, individualism and collectivity. The network context and the host of digital (and logistical) technologies enabling it makes this structuration possible, allowing for quick transitions (so quick that they even lose their character of transition, appearing like jumps sometimes) between those. From twitter to an event and back, from an email to childcare and back, from a project meeting to a lunch with friends, from one airport to another, all in a matter of instances more or less.

³³ For some outlines and genealogies of networked knowledge production see Casas Cortes, M. I (2009) *Social Movements as Sites of Knowledge Production* as well as Gil, S. (2012) *Nuevos Feminismos. Chapter 3: Maps of Globalization.*

³⁴ Precarias a la Deriva (2003) *First Stutterings.*

Does something get lost in the passage? A sense of abstractness and alienation sometimes comes with the lack of processual transition between these dimensions, a feeling of losing coordinates, of drifting in space, producing a spectrum of emotions from enthusiasm to anxiety.

I will permit myself a minor detour via Simondon's thought on anxiety and the loss of reference points, which seems to me quite pertinent to thinking about collectivity and subjectivity in a network context.

In his book on psychic and collective individuation, Simondon elaborates on the example of anxiety as a particular form of affect. Anxiety, according to Simondon, comes about because there are tensions in the subject (the subject being that in which pre-individual and individual are negotiated via affective-emotive exchanges) that fail to be resolved through recourse to collectivity. When anxious, the subject is caught in a self-exploding movement of self-problematisation, losing all its points of reference and relation. Caught up feeling distant and alienated from its surroundings (what is near appears as far, what is far appears close up), both a sense of internality and a sense of collectivity are negated in anxiety. At a loss of points of reference and feeling infinitely ambivalent, the subject becomes its own main problem, and as Simondon says, in this way 'the subject becomes object - an object of prime importance'³⁵. Sensing the tensions that underlie its being, as triggered by a failing negotiation between subjectivity and objectivity, between one's own forces and those that act upon one, this sense of ambivalence becomes extremely problematic to the subject.

This troubled subject-object most commonly resolves the disintegration that anxiety puts to work by accessing a collective context. The hyper-tension of anxiety (as an intensive negative form of affect) is bound to be resolved through a sharing of affective, linguistic and perceptive capacities that lead the subject to resolve its conflicts and cease being preoccupied with itself as object. If such recourse to the collective does not occur, the subject will either get ill (putting the psycho-somatic to work for a resolution) and/or produce a radical individuation *without* the collective (Simondon doubts if this is possible in extremely rare cases): this would be an individuation that resembles a complete re-invention of the subject, going so far in its departure from that which is

³⁵ See Simondon, Gilbert (1964), *L'individuation Psychique*, in *L'individuation* p.255. My translation from French.

already individuated that it actually leaves behind all prior points of reference. Such might be a movement towards psychosis, which radically refuses a sharing of the pre-individual via collective individuation, rather individuating in a way that is not easily shareable, insisting on the inaccessibility of the indeterminate and making the subject its gatekeeper. Or anxiety might mark a temporary point of crisis that propels the subject towards a further individuation, somewhat radical, quantic in the sense of a leap that is experienced intensively.

Beyond the options of illness, psychosis and radical creativity – which seem all too familiar in relation to contemporary networked subjectivity – it is the question of collectivity that we are following up on here, in its relation to network contexts. The incapacity to connect different dimensions, to trace and grasp lines of transition and relation between points, to mark a passage of experience across two instances of actuality, produces great psychic distress and alienation in globalised and networked worlds. Its often not easy to access a collective dimension in this case, beyond a temporary assemblage of individuals – the production of processes of collective individuation³⁶, as shared transitioning and becoming that expresses itself in a production of experience and knowledge, becomes complicated in the architecture of networks. The emergence of ‘we’s hinges on the capacity of generating shared processes that can be told and grasped, wherein a common comes to be produced (beyond the shared referencing of already existing knowledges, in the style of chit-chat).

This problematic has been theorized in referring to the term ‘dispersion’ in some Argentinian and Spanish contexts recently³⁷. In exploring the questions of mobility and migration on the basis of some accounts of embodied and collective experience here, it is this underlying social dynamic of dispersion that I am addressing. The following drifts across networked mobilities and migration seek to give some voices to the seemingly unaccountable borderlands and gaping voids that lie between some of the dimensions outlined above: between territories local and global, bodily intimacy and bodies in transit, borders, relations and knowledges. Indeed in order to account for gaps

³⁶ For an extensive account of this problem in Simondon, see Zechner, M. (2008) Careful, Vulnerable Entrepreneurs.

³⁷ The Argentine philosopher-analyst Franco Ingrassia was in Madrid for some months in 2010/11, just before the 15M movement took off, to work on this concept in a series of workshops and conversations at the art space Matadero. The concept was taken up by movements there and helped contextualize the experience of mobilization that followed. Ingrassia mentions the work of Ignacio Lewkowicz as setting some foundations for this conceptual elaboration. See Fernandez-Savater, A. (2011), *Pensar (en) la dispersion*. p.155

it is sometimes necessary to pass by an exploration of limits, so as to have a sense of the outlines and positionings of self and other in a space of flows. The feelings of ‘overflowing, saturation and uncertainty’³⁸ that dispersion produces according to Ingrassia are characterized by boundlessness, plenitude and emptiness at the same time: a loss of feelings of inside and outside, of beginnings and endings, a loss of the sense of a membrane that connects we may say. A text by the nanopolitics group narrates the process of grasping relations through limits and boundaries, in a session of ‘contact improvisation for radicals’:

We always wanted to “go beyond”, to challenge or deceive the physical and cultural borders between ourselves and others, while pushing, reinventing others and ourselves. A sense of endless stretchability and capability may be reflecting the self-confidence of the enlightened or materialist individual will. But also, it may be reflecting that incurable desire to rebel against the inhibitions of a protestant body or the oppressive constraints of the Catholicism so rooted in our bodies and morals, so pervasive in the sentimental education and habitus of many of us, especially Southern and Central Europeans. Yet, for the first time, through the body and the words of the other, I acknowledge the *impassability* of some boundaries. This is not about lacking the rebellious, revolutionary passion to dare. This is rather about the capacity to observe and listen to another affective embodied history, connected but separate, *different* from mine.³⁹

The body, but also the capacity to dwell in a relation and explore what holds it together, are important sites of interrogation for articulating a micro-politics of precarious networks and globalized lives. The question of continuity of relations and experiences is crucial here:

The problem is no longer dispassionate routine, but the construction of a continuity of relation in the midst of the generalized and permanent agitation of its conditions (variations of work, schedules, localizations, activities, projects and all the other ties we have).⁴⁰

Hence my insistence on chains and other kinds of ties of interdependency in following

³⁸ Ibid. p.147.

³⁹ Nanopolitics group (2013) *Notes and reflections from some Nanopolitics sessions*. In: The Nanopolitics Handbook.

chapters: how to imagine association beyond the fast dis/activation of links in the network?

Individualization and loneliness

Marga Padilla, a hacker from Madrid, has worked extensively to describe the fallacies and promises of the network model from a feminist perspective. In a 2011 interview, she sums up parts of this:

Networks – well, maybe you’ve already read about the origins of the internet, in the 70s, and all that, a history that’s already quite far gone – you’ll know that networks, that the internet was designed so that it could continue to be as operative as possible when some of its nodes were attacked or dropped out. And that model translated itself towards social networks, as a model for their functioning. With the network model, because it is designed like that...what happens is that the network is designed to be as operative as possible even though there are parts of it that disconnect. This has led to... if I project this metaphor towards my social life, it means that if I disappear from the places in which I am connected, these places will keep functioning the same, or quite well. I wouldn’t say the same, but quite well.⁴¹

The new flexibility gained within networks also entails a becoming-disposable, a feature of new practices of social networking as much of new business and employment practices. No amount of hyperactivity within networks can eliminate the constant threat of disconnection and loneliness:

[...] it was a model that produced a lot of loneliness. Because the effort of connecting has its cost – to maintain oneself connected has its costs in economic, psychic, physical and other terms. If you’re not capable of sustaining that, well you’ll collapse... you be devastated and fall into a very big loneliness, which is the absence of connections.⁴²

Across contexts of precarious militancy that affirms sensitivity and vulnerability, as is the case with the groups that make up my field of research, a new front for struggle

⁴⁰ Fernandez-Savater, A. (2011), *Pensar (en) la dispersion*. P.149

⁴¹ Interview with Marga.

⁴² Ibid.

emerged in the networked context: micro-political and caring practices are needed in order to face a growing alienation from collective contexts and everyday solidarities.

Visibility and social capital

In his sociological account of the art world, Pascal Gielen points out that networks easily develop ‘scenes’ wherein social and cultural capital are accumulated and circulate:

In a world in which individuality and authenticity are highly prized, in leisure activities as well as in the workplace, the scene constitutes a comfortable setting. The scene is a form of social organization that generates the freedom of temporary and flexible relations unavailable in a group (with relatively closed membership), for instance. The scene produces social cohesion and a shared identity unknown in a social category like an age-related or professional group. Relations within the scene are relatively free of obligations, but not without rules. [...] These are the very characteristics that make the scene an ideal form of social organization in the present network society. Local scenes are proving to be familiar focal points within a worldwide network. They generate just enough, but not too much, intimacy for global nomads. Whether you enter the art scene in Shanghai, Tokyo, New York, London, Berlin or Brussels, you find a familiar frame of reference despite what may be a totally different cultural context. [...] The scene provides a safe, familiar, yet admittedly temporary home in a globalized world. Or, as Alan Blum puts it: it offers a kind of urban intimacy that enables a person to survive in a chilly urban environment and anonymous global time. The reason, to some extent, is that professional and public activities within a scene affect the domestic domain. Professional and private activities, work and personal relationships, often merge seamlessly.⁴³

Circles of professional, voluntaristic or ‘manufactured’⁴⁴ networking increasingly merge with those of personal life, making it difficult to conceive of relations of trust and friendship when powers of competition constantly overrule them. This is a frequent problem in career-oriented cultures such as the art scene or business worlds. As Gielen points out, no professional network is homogeneous or lacks intersections with ‘life’ –

⁴³ Gielen, Pascal (2009), *The Art Scene: A Clever Working Model for Economic Exploitation?* In: *Open 17*, SKOR Website.

⁴⁴ Hodgson, L. (2004). *Manufactured Civil Society*. *Critical Social Policy* 24(2).

spheres of intimacy, friendships, groups, etc. Yet the intersections are often less than ‘seamless’, but rather full of resentment, competition, insecurity and many kinds of conflict. To understand under what conditions a ‘scene’ could function as a care network, and vice versa, it is clearly not enough to look at deeds and desires, since cultures of opportunism emerge out of systemic pressures rather than bad individual intentions.

In post-Fordist economies of individualising cooperation and networking, the fact of working collectively takes on a mystique and aura of novelty readily exploited and promoted by neoliberal management techniques as well as industries of cultural production. This produces a set of problems within domains of cultural production and networked politics, as Anja points out:

People always did things together, people always did things collectively. [‘Collective’] became this kind of catchphrase for a while, as a way of organising with other people – in a way that oftentimes didn’t necessarily have some kind of economic profit value, but there was a lot of cultural value that was attached to it. Especially it came to be thrown around a lot in the arts scenes and creative scenes but also in the political scene [...] it was very difficult to navigate that idea of collectives, because collectives became... they were always a form of work, a shared form of work... but they became quite encompassing for a lot of people and another form of work that was then just unpaid. So that was quite tricky, especially if the people that were in the collective were already on a very minimum wage... you could end up spending your entire time working in a collective for free. I mean there was a lot to be said for that way of working as well, you know collectives were quite wonderful kinds of connections between people...⁴⁵

Ambivalence persists in this account of post-Fordist collectivity as being a source of joy, inspiration and intimacy as well as one of (self-)exploitation and opportunism. Speaking of the context of political networks in London – remembering the time of 2011 – Anja points out the difficulty in putting this much work into collective projects without establishing proper networks of support and care:

⁴⁵ Interview with Anja.

I guess what I found quite tricky sometimes was that [working together] didn't necessarily mean that you were friends. There was a bit of a false intimacy to collectives... that you could spend all this time working – and of course, unmediated by capital – you could spend all this time working with people, sharing these spaces with people, these kinds of temporalities with people, but in the end you may never really have known anything personal about them. I remember in London, something that struck me a lot was that people replaced friendships with collective work. They saw it as their friendships, they saw that as their means of socializing – and that blurring of work and life, that was a very different blurring from the kind of work and life of quite... quite a lot earlier understandings of collective work. Because there you were actually... your livelihoods were collectivised in a sense. And the thing about collective work that I kind of recall is that it wasn't a shared livelihood in a way, your lives weren't shared really. I mean also it kind of allowed for this unchecked proliferation of expectations ...of people... and because we couldn't, because it wasn't that intimacy in the sense of friendship it was sometimes very difficult to understand the needs and desires that people had. You know, and because even in collectives there was this sense of competition sometimes, it was difficult to step out or step away, because of course if you stepped out then your voice wouldn't be heard – again this fear of missing out⁴⁶, you know – you might somehow become unimportant in that collective process. And collectives certainly didn't equate to equality. It didn't mean that everybody was doing the same amount of work, or that people had the same capacities. I think in that context the term 'collective' came to hide a lot of issues in these working processes – there was this kind of sheen to it, a bit of a veneer of what collective meant – and it was very difficult to raise those issues within the collective space itself. Because people had very different investments and very different understandings...⁴⁷

The belief that collaborative groups in the network age produce horizontal power

⁴⁶ Which, as Anja points out at an earlier stage of this interview, to a large extent stems from the predominance of social networking technologies in their production of instant communications and non-stop self-representation, harnessing ones cultural and social capital and linking up with others as a means of survival both economic and social. Interview with Anja.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

relations has already come well undone by the time I speak to Anja about this, and a new sensitivity to the ways in which life and work related comes to be felt here. The blurring of work (whether as art, politics or self-employment) and life brings with it much anxiety and insecurity, wherein the self and the other are always potential obstacles to success, and trust may be hard to build (both in relation to self and other). It is very stressful to accrue cultural capital in spaces where friendship and intimacy also grows, particularly where it is hard to distinguish genuine processes of sharing from projects that will ultimately leave one feel exploited or used. The mystification of networks and collaborations as horizontal and open spaces often makes it hard or impossible to speak about differing interests, agendas and positions – not to mention differing class backgrounds and levels of access and privilege.

To be part of the most prestigious and power-holding ambits in culture, academia, business or politics, much communicational and relational skill is required: a matter of education and class as much as of time and talent. If people who grow up in more affluent and socially mobile families are more likely to pursue and succeed in networking their way to the top, then what politics of class may be required for forging accessible, open and horizontal networks? A text from 2008, sent to me by Anja back then, calls out against elitist networking:

[...]which is part of the libidinal call of corporate, bureaucratic and administrative structure, without which one is destined to either unemployment or long-term stasis in an alienating position – capitalism offers, to those who don't consciously contest its claws, only the option of being exploited, or of exploiting in turn.⁴⁸

Networking as aspirational, efficient and competitive relational technique for expanding ones base of 'contacts' or 'friends' is a technology of power and value extraction. As such it concerns all spheres touched by neoliberal flexibilism. Yet this does not imply that all network contexts are competitive or careerist: people who support each other in childcare, housework, illness and so forth are not instrumentalizing networkers, they are using their power to associate to sustain life and build relations that give them as well as others some stability and security. A network is reducible to a scene when, instead of

⁴⁸ Holopainen, S. (2008), *Against Net-working*.

common ethical notions and practices being established, a circulation of symbolic and/or real capital takes over.

Networking means a mode of organisation that is distributed, flexible and relatively open as opposed to one that is more defined, formal (institutions) and rounded (the group), and as such has its specific problems in specific contexts. Yet as any tool, it is a weapon if you hold it right: beyond altruism or pure exploitation, networking is most often an ambivalent process. To grasp the specific ways in which work and relationality are configured through networks helps imagine possible micropolitical strategies for radicalizing these practices beyond and against the neoliberal subjectivity. Despite remaining generally critical, Holopainen's text finishes with a call for other ways of relating:

To fight this blight of social technocracy and de-humanisation, we must invoke alternative methods of affiliation and affinity, based not upon mass net-working but steeped in what we can learn through existing friendships, love, and the kind of deep empathy and care wrought by shared struggle.⁴⁹

As I pointed out before, this desire to leave the alienating dynamics of mass networks behind has led to a shift in associational models around 2008, bringing forth a host of network critiques as well as new collective experiments.

Many of these critiques sought to undo naïve notions of networks being beyond power, in bringing in Foucauldian-style analyses that undo ideas of power as static and inherent in persons or forms. Similar analyses have also been of much use in recent Occupy movements: whether it is networks or assemblies, tendencies to argue that undoing power is a matter of form often appear in young social movements. In the case of networks, the existence of hyper-nodes can lead to strong imbalances of power as individuals with many contacts become centers of decision-making, are identified as leaders by authorities, media, institutions, and so forth. Such dynamics easily go unnoticed where there isn't a micropolitical culture capable of addressing different roles and privileges:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

[...] some individuals are ‘more networked’ than others, a quality that can be derived from material conditions such as the ones described above (high mobility, time-flexibility, etc.) and others that are more contingent, such as knowing the people who are particularly relevant in a situation, ‘having been around longer’, being friends with other individuals or whatever. To these one might add personal attributes, such as being a good speaker, charisma, and so on.⁵⁰

Concentrations of visibility in individuals or single groups are equivalent to concentrations in representational power: some come to speak on behalf of others, represent and govern. Yet beyond shying away from representation altogether, or from proposing rigid formalist solutions to these matters, how to strike a balance between process and strategy, between micropolitics and macropolitics?

Structure/lessness and in/formality

Micropolitics and macropolitics are often presented in opposition to one another, as mutually exclusive. Felix Guattari points out that they are not just connected but depend on one another: no sustainable movement without collective ecologies, no radical collectivity without an engagement with the outside, the world and its institutions. An excessive focus on one or the other puts collective processes in danger of becoming polarized and stratified, and both excessive formality and informality lead to loss of trust. Concerning the question of network ethics, it is useful to revisit the debate around ‘tyrannical structurelessness’ versus structuralist deadlock that occurred in 1970s US-feminist movements. As Anja Kanngieser and myself summed up a much discussed text by Jo Freeman criticizes the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’:

Set against the backdrop of what she perceived as a moment of crisis in the women’s liberation movement, Freeman’s critique centres around what she described as the movement’s de-structuration. This was witnessed in its atomisation into friendship and affinity groups, which, she contends, not only limits its potential to one of consciousness-raising but also acts to mask the distributions of power hidden within the rhetoric of structurelessness. For Freeman, these criticisms go hand in hand; the formation of small inward

⁵⁰ See Nunes, Rodrigo (2005), *Nothing is what democracy looks like*.

looking groups and factions is alienating and thus cannot nourish the growth of a larger feminist movement. Underpinning Freeman's argument is her claim that all groups have structures, and these are either formal or informal. In de-structured groups, informal structures are built and reproduced by "elites": in the context of the women's movement "a group of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities". According to Freeman "because people are friends, usually sharing the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't".⁵¹

An equally polemical response to this text – written by Cathy Levine and entitled 'The Tyranny of Tyranny' – argues that Freeman fails to acknowledge a non-party mode of organising via small groups, which entails a different degree and mode of in/formality than bureaucratic institutions:

Small groups, on the other hand, multiply the strength of each member. By working collectively in small numbers, the small group utilises the various contributions of each person to their fullest, nurturing and developing individual input, instead of dissipating it in the competitive survival-of-the-fittest/smartest/wittiest spirit of the large organisation. [...] What we definitely don't need is more structures and rules, providing us with easy answers, pre-fab alternatives and no room in which to create our own way of life. What is threatening the female Left and the other branches even more, is the 'tyranny of tyranny', which has prevented us from relating to individuals, or from creating organisations in ways that do not obliterate individuality with prescribed roles, or from liberating us from capitalist structure.⁵²

The question is how 'new institutional forms' emerging from friendly networks become more formal without becoming institutionalized or commercialized to a degree that removes autonomy from subjects. In the context of a largely digital,

⁵¹ See Kanngieser, A. and Zechner, M. (2008), *Speaking the unspeakable: structures and structurelessness in anarcho-queer and femme organising*. Unpublished Conference Paper.

⁵² Levine, C. (1979), *The Tyranny of Tyranny*, Originally published in *Black Rose*, number 1, Spring. (Rising Free Collective).

telecommunications and web-based world it poses itself afresh, and requires new approaches. The party or old bureaucratic institution are no longer our main point of reference when we think about social movements; governance operates differently today. Policy, funding, obsessive and infinitely differentiating measure, neoliberal bureaucracy in other words, subjects us to regimes of representation and hierarchization very subtly. As Pantxo remembers,

All the 20th century, the 2nd part of the 20th century at least, but before as well, modernity would work on the idea of representing society... of producing a coherent and homogeneous representation of society. And I think in these years [around 2010] we were working on.. thinking not of representation but of an expression. And so what it means to have not a representative institution – cause we know that representative institution is really a hegemonic view, is a way through which you can produce a lot of relations of power – but to think of expressive institutions: institutions that deal with the particularity of each positionality, that deal with heterogeneity in a positive and affirmative way.⁵³

The threat of the large scale representational institution is still at work even some forty years after the publication of Freeman's text, albeit in new variants of governance. Yet a rejection of straightforward representation and a search for new ways of thinking the formalisation of processes – what some call 'instituent'⁵⁴ or 'instituting' practices – have become more powerful in the context of network cultures. Where neoliberal governance operates a principle of 'divide, reassemble and rule' by making people compete and cooperate with each other across ever shifting categorisations and convergences, instituting is often key in order to overcome network accumulation. I will discuss governance and institutionality further in section C: what seems relevant here is that while the crisis of representational forms clearly is an ongoing one, a new way of thinking the relation between the formal and the informal has emerged. It is no coincidence that this is to some extent prefigured in feminist struggles, where attention has always been given to ways of linking the everyday with larger scale organising.

Space and networks: territories

⁵³ Interview with Pantxo.

⁵⁴ See for instance a 2007 edition of Transversal webjournal on this issue, where several authors I refer to are featured.

Networks are existential territories, singular in their configuration – openness and expansion always need to be defined in relation to their singular situation. It is often shared spaces that bring people together, and the role of groups, assemblies and events in public spaces in forging relationships is hardly to be underestimated. Geographical space is important, as Oscar points out in an interview in 2011, speaking about constellations of London collectives:

[...] probably some of these people... I mean clearly some of these groups result from shared interest, but they also result from the fact that people happen to be in the same place, in the same space and time... for probably very different reasons...⁵⁵

An understanding of territories and temporalities is needed in order to make ‘this idea of networks drop from its very aloof and phantasmagorical construction, into a kind of sandy ground, and gravel’⁵⁶. While networks can build shared territories across geographical distances and gaps, weaving globalised associational worlds, a network’s territory also need to be concrete and accessible in order to offer association a stable ground and relation to local realities. This ‘sandy ground’ echoes the words of Fatimatta, responding to a question about conceptually and practically connecting chains (as in care) with networks:

It is difficult, they are quite antagonistic images, but what you realise lasts over the years are territories. For example at that time I still lived in Lavapiés, a neighbourhood of Madrid. So in the recurrence of experiences, of projects, of lives in common, there emerges something like a carved out space [‘cuenca’/basin], which is already something more stable, that has a whole series of common notions, of ways of doing, of knowing who is the other and not to be too careless, for example when they’re ill. [...] That’s to say that, it is not like we can say ‘now we’ll stop being a network and move on to another thing’ because that doesn’t go with the subjectivity that’s ours, contemporarily – but with the compromises that come with militancy, territories are carved out – inhabited by networks but which generate a certain permanency vis-a-vis

⁵⁵ Interview with Oscar.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

networks that are mobile.⁵⁷

The interplay between local groups and translocal networks – inevitable in times of globalisation – poses a big challenge for both mobile and immobile inhabitants of networks. If a common territory is one that may be shared differentially, by all – how may we understand the territory across and beyond geographical space? Guattari's notion of existential territories hints towards what I am trying to get at: the multidimensionality of our ways of inhabiting the contemporary nexus of the psychic, social, urban, affective, technological and bodily in networked spaces⁵⁸. The 'experience of sharing a collective body', as Barbara Glowczewski describes the Guattarian notion of existential territories: not negating space and place, but composing new bodies within and across them⁵⁹.

The city is a territory shared by all participants in this investigation, and has been amply analysed by many of them in the ways in which it structures encounters, communications, intimacies and exchanges⁶⁰. Pantxo, who for a long time was living between Barcelona and London, insists on the importance of not just grasping the metropolis in this respect, but also relations across metropolises. Responding to a question about the way labour, precarity and affectivity often drive people in his network to move and migrate between cities, he adds:

Our territory was transmetropolitan itself... I mean, if you think the city of London itself at that moment, the metropolis was defined by its trans-local dimension in terms of what were the memories, what were the experiences, was a space of flows... like, this thing that Castells said in the 90s, though it was very sociological, was very true – there was a crisis between what he called the space of places and the space of flows; and I think we were the first generation that lived that as constitutive element of their lives...⁶¹

⁵⁷ Interview with Fatimatta.

⁵⁸ See for instance Guattari, F. (1992) *Nouveau millénaire, Défis libertaires*, Interview with Félix Guattari, in *Qu'est ce que l'écosophie*, Terminal n°5, 1992.

⁵⁹ See: Glowczewski, B. Manning, E. and Massumi, B. (2009) *Micropolitics in the Desert - Politics and the Law in Australian Aboriginal Communities - An Interview with Barbara Glowczewski*, 27th Nov 2008. In: *Inflexions Journal* no.3.

⁶⁰ See for instance the blogs of the Spanish Observatorio Metropolitano and the Stupidcity blog.

⁶¹ Interview with Pantxo.

The metropolis itself can be understood as an ever-changing conjunct of rhythms, flows, machines, bodies, materials, affects, money, sounds. The strict division between a global and a local dimension, between a sphere of interconnectedness and a sphere of pure locality, are already broken by the beginning of the third millennium. A dynamic that produces much disorientation and also guilt: airmiles, fragmented presence in local dynamics, long distance relationships, etc. A lot of overlapping and often conflicting dynamics across places that are hard to process and negotiate collectively.

The question of the rhythms of collective territories and practices is more than a merely aesthetic one, giving clues to ways of understanding individuation as relating to the social and political. Pascal Michon, in his book on 'The Rhythms of the Political'⁶² defines rhythm as 'the organisation of that which moves' or 'manner [manière] of flowing'. This enables an interesting reading of individuation in relation to social movements. As phenomena of association strongly linked to the ways in which collective and individual phases and modalities of becoming overlap and compose with each other, social movements very much hinge on the ways in which phases and rhythms of thinking and acting overlap across a broad field of actors. We may take those processes of composition as the basis from which to grasp social-political events and practices – for instance looking at the ways in which rhythms of globalised labour, everyday reproduction, technologically mediated communications, social indignation, solidarious mobilisation and affective resistance interrelate with specific life trajectories. My use of narrative interview materials aims to get at such analysis.

Pascal Michon, in the mentioned book, gives some cues as to how different rhythms of individuation may be read across the body, language, the social and history-anthropology. A promising approach to dispersion and networked realities presents itself there, as Michon dwells on the fact that even in contemporary fluid spaces that are seemingly unstructured, there are logics of organisation and meaning-making at play:

If today more than ever we can say that individuals have no stability whatsoever, nor any constant identity, that they are always mutating, implicated in changing intensities and that their being is in perpetual becoming, that does not in any way mean that they are simple packets of connections, knots of influence,

⁶² Michon, P. (2007): *Les Rythmes du Politique*. Paris: Les Prairies Ordinaires.

overlappings of flows or whirlwinds that happen by chance and without any continuity. Their identity might be fluid, but it does not disappear with/in the flux of things. The processes that make them be what they are are not erratic or discrete, they are organised and have *styles/manners* [manières] of realising themselves, which in themselves change in more slow and probably discontinuous ways.⁶³

This proposition of analysing the broader and slower tendencies underlying the transformations of individual becoming allows us to take the question of dispersion away from lamentations about insubstantiality towards investigations of instances of composition and practice. There are concrete forms of relation, practice and life being forged within the current era of global, neoliberal and networked work and life. A new way of understanding temporal flows as well as spatial dimensions comes with this: attempts at engaging time-energy as well as territory and situatedness anew.

The notion of existential territories (as well as that of ‘ritournellos’) of Felix Guattari captures the rhythmical, pathic and even musical relations between experience, time, space, knowledge and practice:

The apprehension of the world, what I call the constitution of an existential territory, corresponds in the existential polyphony with a sort of continuous base [basse], that’s to say a chaosmic basis [base] upon which different lines are constructed like in a motet. In other words, the deployment of a musical universe is, for me, always doubled by a chaosmic apprehension that constitutes an existential territory to which the listener will come and agglomerate themselves with in a pathic way, that’s to say independently of the fact that there is a cognitive relation [rapport] to the music, a memory, or a knowledge.⁶⁴

Similar to the pathic engagement with music, the confrontation with the dimension of movement and rhythm in a given social context implies a practice of listening and tuning in. In relation to networks, this means a capacity to pay attention to relational

⁶³ Ibid. p.38. My translation from French.

⁶⁴ In: Guattari, F. (1992), *L’heterogenese dans la creation musicale*. Interview-transcription of a conversation between Félix Guattari, Georges Aperghis and Antoine Gindt, 22 december 1991. In: *Révue Chimères Nr.38*. My translation from French.

processes that are not merely sociological but also changing, felt and sensed, and as such an understanding of movement as marked by changing rhythms and flows. The subjectivities, ethics and aesthetics that emerge across contemporary networked relational spaces imply a resignifying of space-time as well as of intimacy and alienation, bringing forth new forms of care. The challenge of network cultures to a large extent concerns ways of translating common notions and forms of trust and continuity across such dispersed territories and temporalities of relation. Any attempt at such translation needs to take women's experiences and practices into account, in order to map out the way pathic, micropolitical and reproductive dimensions relate to geopolitical and historical time-space.

Women's perspectives on networks

The 'feminisation' of labour and societies - perceived as a potential by Autonomist theorists of the 1970s and as a threat to civilization by the contemporary right-wing in the global north - entails more women entering the labour market as well as work itself becoming more 'feminine'⁶⁵: based on multitasking and more flexible and less valued. 'Feminisation' is of course not an effect of gender but of capital. As a process of primitive accumulation, it is an appropriation of the informal by capital, and entails the concentration of a previously common wealth in fewer hands. Insecure working and living conditions that predominantly concerned women now come to concern all of society: invisibility, precarity, being treated as disposable and inferior, exploited and domesticated.

In the global north, the post-industrial condition left more women to enter the labour force (in precarious and part-time jobs, nowhere near the breadwinner wages of males⁶⁶) while more and more men entered unemployment due to the changing paradigm of labour (fewer factories, more services). With the current crises, which one may see as an extension of 'feminised' accumulation, jobs and rights are cut across the board. Where women are portrayed as the winners of recent economic developments, they in fact aren't at all: their wages are still lower than those of men, they are stuck with precarious and part time jobs, their caring burden is triple since they not only sort out the home and care for children these days but also sustain it financially, as well as

⁶⁵ Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat*, p.60

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61

taking responsibility for looking after elderly people in ageing societies. The welfare cuts of the 'crisis', particularly to child benefits, childcare and elderly care, leave women much more vulnerable than men.

Within this feminised accumulation, neo-communitarianism and flexible service provision also draw on intelligences and skills specific to women's historical experiences. Raquel Mezquita and Margarita Padilla point out that 'feminine' labour is based on the establishment of informal networks, which throughout centuries of patriarchy have been the domain of women and the 'feminised' subaltern, those with little access to rights and publicness. There is something to learn from women's movements that have tried to turn precisely this dynamic in their favour. How to politically address the labours and ambivalences of holding together loose networks, multiple jobs, minding care as well as professional ties, providing informal safety nets and spaces of affectivity, serving with a smile? If in the network paradigm, 'the masculine has hierarchically integrated the feminine' and if networks 'appear to have captured all of life'⁶⁷, how to go about reclaiming life across them?

Politics too sees a feminisation since the advent of the Internet and network technologies, yet often problematically: using the productive powers of informality and multitasking without incorporating rhythms that actually match those of life and the everyday. Padilla and Mezquita critique the hacker mode of doing politics for its total dedication of life to political work, its culture of authorship/names and its failure to integrate any times and spaces of reproduction or care. Indeed in those hyper-networked contexts '[...]participation is not the problem, because these callings [to be more active] take place in a system that imposes participation as obligation, even though via the format of free choice.'⁶⁸ Mezquita and Padilla imagine another way of inhabiting networks and thus of using one's feminine intelligences and sensitivities:

It is impossible to set out a space, time, thoughts and resources proper, without building groups that are capable of coming in contact with other experiences, of tying in with autonomous reproductive circuits, to produce, sustain and protect experiences/experiments [experiencias] of autonomy. [...] Women who resist

⁶⁷ Mezquita, R. and Padilla, M. (2006) *Penelope: Tejiendo y destejiendo la red*, in: *Ciberactivismo: sobre usos políticos y sociales de la red*. Barcelona: Virus Editions. p.105.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.107.

always being available, always in the net. Women who resist the pursuit of *uptime*, the submission to *upgrades*, the stress of infoproduction. [...] They don't achieve 'another world' but their sceptical gesture defies the lonely world of the net-economy.⁶⁹

Acknowledging the importance of autonomous politics, Padilla and Mezquita point to the need for a feminist politics of inhabiting networks. Women have always been at the operative margins of power, ethically (and perhaps strategically) relating to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

Feminist refusals of net-work

A feminist or women's way of inhabiting networks means resisting the culture of hyper-nodes while constructing circuits of support and care:

Women who resist representation, the construction of figures upon which power and knowledge are concentrated. [...] The network society connects as much as it marginalizes. Women who have already resisted being represented via a figure that unites them and that also resist constructing themselves as marginalized. Capital destroys the social ties we need in order to reconstruct us in a depoliticized mode. Affective communication is destroyed in order to be constructed as insecurity and fear. The experience of pleasure is destroyed in order to be rehashed as an experience of identity. The eroticisation of immediate life is destroyed in order to be re-established as passion for work. Women that resist abstraction, that resist the virtualisation of lives. Neither connected nor marginalised. Handling silence.⁷⁰

Reengaging the refusal of labour in the context of the total mobilisation of life, Mezquita and Padilla remember the values of strategic withdrawal. To be sure, this is about a withdrawal of attention: the challenge lies in articulating care as a differentiated and ethical way of giving attention rather than as a permanent and indiscriminate mobilisation of attention. The 'care strike', as first proposed by the Precarias a la Deriva and since taken up in widely in the Spanish context, is a differentiated way of laying down cooking pots, clothes irons, brooms, nappies, shopping bags and so forth: a

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.109

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.110

moment for women to gather and relinquish their caring tasks for a day or two, so that the effects of their withdrawal of reproductive labour makes itself felt not just to their husbands but also the employers of the latter. In the 15M movement, such care strikes have recently entailed performative pickets and women's discussion groups: to imagine those done not just in the context of heteronormative everydays but also of networked militancy, may prove interesting. Although in militant worlds barely sensitive to the body and care, a refusal thereof may just lead collective cultures to revert to their most juvenile and relationally impoverished forms.

Or perhaps such withdrawal might simply mean non-participation in certain activist culture, and the establishment of other circuits. The problem with such withdrawal of attention is of course that it contradicts the formula for economic survival – the accumulation of social-cultural capital via incessant participation in networks of high currency – and thus threatens the livelihoods of those on strike. Yet turning this on its head, we can also see how the building of networks in itself constitutes a response to precarization: the point is hardly to transcend this organisational form but to understand and change it. This likely requires a combination of non-participation, differential attention (care) and re-invention.

Care vs. respect

Another aspect of refusing care may concern the refusal of *caritas*, or 'the blackmailing side of care' as Marissa from Madrid calls it in an interview. She tells me how in the 15M movement, the term 'care' was initially proposed for a commission, but then another conceptual frame was chosen to shift the focus to 'respect'. One may see this as an antifeminist move, but as Marissa (from the Precarias a la Deriva circuit) interprets it differently, arguing that 'respect' enabled a new dynamic in relating across this new social movement:

I think that there was, in this being together and talking [ie. assemblies], also a new way of being together with strangers. There wasn't talk about care, I think I remember that there was talk about respect, and in fact I prefer this word. Because I ended up associating care also with things a bit to do with blackmail, like... [...] it was this thing of coming back to learn to listen to others, even though they may be very different, of not having so many prejudices and always reducing your interlocutor to 'they're this, they're that, he's a bourgeois person,

she's a privileged person, has this or that profession, so I won't listen any more because...' and also to take into account that when one discusses, in order to discuss one also has to generate, like...the material conditions necessary so that people can enjoy, or so that you can be comfortable – well all that was taken into consideration. It was quite a new way of being together, I'd say. So yes, 'respect', a fundamental word, also to explain all that happened afterwards [as the 15M movement matured] – and on top of that, for me respect in this moment had to do with this attention to being well, above all with listening, to not look down on others – to me respect is fundamental for the autonomy of persons.⁷¹

Marissa here also speaks from the yearlong collaboration that some ex-precarias did with the 'Forum for an Independent Life and Diversity', a group of militant disabled people, producing the book 'Cripples and Precarious Women making lives that matter'⁷². Respect is a fundamental term when it comes to disability, and many of the activists Marissa collaborated with prefer this term to the often patronizing or caritative politics of care. Perspectives on care shift, depending on where one looks from: off the shores of masculinist activist worlds, care may be full of contradictions, something worth refusing and transforming.

Bodies and limits, trust and respect: indispensable connections

Thinking the limits of the body as much as the much affirmed Spinozian question of 'what a body can do' can open onto affirmations of care within networks, and feminist perspectives make this possible beyond voluntarist affirmations of goodwill or patronizing/maternalistic modes of control and dependency. The limits of the body need respect as much as care, within a network paradigm: the contemporary abundance of self-care techniques and products cannot save a body that doesn't respect its limits in the first place. No amount of therapy can help where there is respect and trust missing, and as such a micropolitics of networks must avoid the affirmation of care and creativity as inherent qualities or dispositions, and rather focus on them as attitudes, cultures and technologies.

As fragility comes to be an undeniable aspect of networked life/work, often alongside a host of mental and physical problems and illnesses, care becomes an inevitable concept

⁷¹ Interview with Marisa, Oct 2011, Madrid.

⁷² Agencia de Asuntos Precarios Todas aZien and Foro de Vida Independiente (2011) *Cojos y Precarias hacienda vidas que importan*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.

and practice. Amongst all the possible perspectives and experiences of care, I remain focused on the questions of ethics and sustainability that contemporary precarity poses in relation to radical politics. The role of networks in holding together circles of friends and lovers, building bases upon which new kinds of alliances and forms of belonging are articulated, are crucial here. The questions of mobility-migration and families are important axes in articulating a new kind of politics of precarious care networks. As Gabriella remembers London networks around 2010, she points to a need to develop practices beyond the fatalist tendencies of global capitalism and neoliberal subjectivity:

The neoliberal subjectivity... do you remember that I mentioned this thing of us being migrants and being quite individualistic... being actually a good emblem...symbol...example of the ideology, there was the ideology within that period of the self-made man, the man or the woman who is able to invent himself all the time, and is responsible for his failure. [...] It was absolutely normalized as a discourse, it was absolutely everywhere, and producing this sense of guilt in everyone – I have to take care of my own precarity, I have to rely on myself eventually. Anyway... so that was there. And our practices somehow were excessive, they went beyond that already, because they included the fact that we could rely on others, but also that we wanted to dare beyond that sadness. A kind of workaholic and anxiotic [probably: anxiety-ridden] mood of having always to survive⁷³.

The discontent with networks becomes blatant at the end of the first decade of 2000, with the very mentioning of the word provoking grimaces and exhaustion. A model and project that failed, better abandoned? Perhaps this could be so, if networks weren't precisely what we rely upon in moments of grave precarity: there's not just a hype but also a serious question of networks as survival structures, circuits of collaboration, complicity and commoning. The role of networks within the current crisis is to do with mutual aid and care as much as with creativity and immaterial labour. Based on the micropolitical considerations I explored here in relation to post-Fordism and activist subcultures, I will now map out some similar dynamics in migration and reproduction.

Having started out analysing the emergence of a new networked politics in the

⁷³ Interview with Gabriella, London, July 2011.

1990s/2000s, as well as practices of collaboration and co-production that came with it, we have seen some new understandings of 'work' and organisation emerge. Those enable breathtaking affirmations of autonomy while also making new forms of heteronomy and individualization apparent. How do the logics of the network expand the practices of militants or 'activists' in a way that restructures solidarities not only globally but also locally, and not only in relation to collaboration and work but also in relation to conviviality and the everyday? We have explored how the models of 'network cultures', 'organised networks' and 'economies of contribution' are counter-concepts that seek to subvert the competitive and alienating creativity of neoliberal networks. We have taken these towards a reflection on network practice and subjectivity as situated and embodied, taking into account care. As some new ways of relating autonomy and heteronomy have begun to resonate across these recent chapters, a micropolitics of post-Fordist networks – attentive to time and temporality, trust and territories, bodies and situations – has emerged. The ways in which women and feminists in social movements engage with such networks have opened new perspectives here: in what follows, we go further into the domain of the home and the family, in order to expand our understanding of how situated practices of care may compose with transversal struggles and conditions.

This leads us to emphasize that the organisational and micropolitical configurations of the work-life relation that post-Fordism and precarity imply are not the unique sites of the production of networked subjectivity. The following section continues to open up the questions of precarity and networks beyond the worlds of service work in the West. When it comes to looking beyond the logic of production and so to some extent also that of surplus, towards its 'other', we thus find an organizational form much hidden in mainstream economics and social movements alike, yet crucial to their functioning: the family, prime site of social reproduction. What is the relation of the family to accumulation, governance and self-organisation? These are some of the questions the following chapter moves on to ask.

B.2 Precarity, militancy and network-families

All of a sudden, we don't simply see the world as an ensemble of autonomous individuals that pursue rational ends and life projects, but we see the world as an ensemble of persons taken in networks of care and engaged in responding to the care needs that surround them.¹

Why talk about the family in the context of precarity and social movements? The family becomes relevant as a support structure not just in the context of the rising unemployment and precarity of the current crisis. In this moment, mostly through feminist efforts, the family is also coming under renewed consideration in social movements, such as in the 'Reclaim the family' initiative of the feminisms commission of the 15M Madrid, who counter the neoconservative politics of their austerity government with the slogan 'the nuclear family is radioactive'. At the same time, a generation of militants who shaped the (Euro) MayDay movements are passing through their 30s, trying to inhabit the current cycles of struggle in sustainable ways and trying to forge 'self-reproducing' movements, as Silvia Federici puts it, beyond the individualizing tendencies of the network model. New questionings and experiments around the family emerge, whether as monstrous² militant assemblage of care or as resistant nucleus within webs of mutual aid. To not be blind to this appears important in building not just self-sustaining but also transversal movements that can shape another politics of social reproduction.

Shifting our gaze towards the micropolitics of networks, establishing the connections and commitments, temporalities and spatialities, affects and effects of the network form on ways of negotiating work and life, we may see a set of interdependencies and efforts

¹ Molinier, P., Laugier, S. and Paperman, P. (eds.) (2009): *Qu'est-ce que le care?* p.39

² In using this term, I point to similar proposals around institutions and precarious workers. See for instance Raunig, G. (2007) *The Monster-Precariat*. *Translate Webjournal*, eicpc, or the *Translate Webjournal* on 'Monster Institutions' of 2008.

to care and sustain instead of a mere field of opportunism and competition. Yet since precarity fragments time and splits the future into thousands of impossible possibles, precarious networks struggle to project longer-term belonging and projects. How to imagine existing and subsisting within them throughout decades, throughout life stages involving childcare, elderly care, healthcare and sustained mutual aid? Whilst crisis and austerity make new collective organisations, solidarities and resistances emerge, their consistency and sustainability hinge on the building of collective trust, desire, invention and care. This requires a politics of resisting finance, debt and accumulation as well as a new micropolitics of trust and associational bonds. In inventing other forms of common production and reproduction, of relating work to life, the family needs to be addressed as a key site of commoning and care, and one that precarious movements dodge without paying enough attention perhaps. Family as form, practice and concept: beyond conservatism, I will pay some attention to how the family may relate to precarious and militant networks in this chapter.

The state of the family in times of crisis and austerity

The family is a subject-object that hasn't been dealt with much in recent 'young' social movements like those of the Global Justice, EuroMayDay or various more recent student movements. Yet these days, with a generation of activists growing older and with the deepening of current social and economic crises, questions around the social organisation of reproduction come to the fore. After all 'the crisis' is not just a financial but a reproductive one, concerning the economies and ecologies of the commons and their sustainability. New movements deal with commoning and alternative economic models, yet still their analyses and struggles rarely touch upon the family.

The family: neuralgic spot of neoliberal subjectivity, taboo in many militant circles for being synonymous with conservative, nuclear organisations of filiation, contested territory of feminist politics. Across networks of precarious workers and activists, many serious and legitimate doubts and hesitations exist concerning this domain: what follows is an investigation of some dynamics concerning reproduction in contexts of networks and precarity, assessing the potential benefits of reclaiming the concept of the family.

In the previous chapter, networks have been variously criticised for promoting short

lived, juvenile, individualist, opportunist and competitive forms of relation³. Here I focus on one particular aspect: the network cannot think the family, it seems. An unsustainable culture of relating and organising perpetuates itself through the silence around the reproduction of everyday bodies, its predominant forms and desirable adaptations. What is the family to precarious militants? There are few visions of desirable families within recent large-scale social movements in the global north. Too many traumatic or uninspiring experiences, too strong an association with the nuclear and patriarchal model.

Yet beyond specific and dominant forms, I will define family in relational terms here: as a space of relation that involves committed, non-transactionalist and relatively unconditional care (whether through blood ties or not). I will argue that beyond merely refusing to engage this kind of relational space, it may be worth reclaiming it: because the family is undeniably the most common reproductive platform across different contexts and societies, indispensable to sustaining our lives. To leave it unthought is shut off a terrain of experience and contestation widely common across the social, and thus to leave a huge field of potential transversal politics ignored. It also means to embrace a very limited understanding of social reproduction, ignoring not just biological reproduction and childrearing but also care for the sick and elderly. What follows is a tentative at redefining this relational field in the terms of social movements and radical feminist practices.

Care largely passes through family bonds in our societies, and increasingly so with less state support. In Europe, the dismantling of the welfare state is reactivating the family in a variety of ways: precarity and unemployment force increasing numbers of young adults to remain in their parental homes, keep them from constructing autonomous lives and indeed also from setting up their own families. This is witnessed particularly in the European (and of course global) south⁴, as some findings of a study conducted in Italy illustrate:

Employment instability strongly curtails the life projects of young people

³ See for instance: Mezquita, Raquel and Padilla, Magarita (2006) *Penelope*, or also Boltanski, L. and E. Chiapello (2007). *The new spirit of capitalism*. London, Verso.

⁴ See Coventry Industrial Relations Research Unit (2011) 'Young people and precarious employment', particularly the list of papers from their Seminar 1 on this issue.

especially with regard to housing and to supporting a household. 47% of stable workers have already moved out from home compared to 18% of temporary workers and 32.6% of the total. Unlike what occurs in northern European countries, for Italian youths moving out from home coincides with the setting up of their own families following marriage or the decision to live together with their partners (traditional model of transition into adult life). Among respondents, 25% live with their partners starting from the average age of 27. To ensure this passage into adulthood, job security is a key factor: 39% of indefinite-term workers are living on their own with their partners with respect to a mere 11% among temporary workers⁵. Consequently, the passage to parenthood strongly depends on achieving occupational security. The probability of having children (involving but 13.7% of respondents) drastically diminishes as you shift away from indefinite-term to temporary workers, from 21% to 5.8%. The differences between stable and precarious workers persists when same age groups are considered: among youths belonging to the 25-to-34 age group, 54.4% of standard workers live on their own compared to 25.7% among precarious workers (compared to 42.8% of the total). Within this same age group, 25.4% of standard workers have had at least one child compared to 10% among temporary workers (compared to 19% of the total).⁶

There is not just social but also demographic change associated with the reconfiguration of the function and form of family in the contexts of precarity and austerity. The biopolitics of (neo-)conservative crisis governments comprise new ways of promoting traditional nuclear families (apart from populist rhetoric, witness the restructuring of welfare in ways that make it difficult for women to work, and for people to have many children) and traditional gender roles (since women are dearly needed by the hearth in times of unemployment, to keep families afloat and populations calm), as well as making abortion less accessible (legally and/or by cutting abortion services). The family is a contested site in times of crisis, even if negotiations around it are covert (since it is supposed to be 'holy', the epitome of private space, the realm of 'invisible hands' par excellence). Perhaps it is the ever laudatory and promotional attitude politicians adopt

⁵ Dota, F. (2011) *Economic crisis and flexibility in Italy: the "tsunami" of youth unemployment*. Paper presented at ESRC Seminar on Young people and precarious employment, Coventry University, March 2011.

⁶ Ibid.

towards the family, most facile object for producing consensus and demonstrating goodwill, that lead cultures of the left to be equally unequivocal in its rejection. Yet it is worth to look at this relational space – used, abused, tokenistically instrumentalised and rhetorically mystified – in concrete and contemporary terms.

Welfare withdrawal often causes families to collapse into themselves for support, heightening pressure on members and bringing back more archaic forms of family: in Spain, new regulations introduced in 2012 exclude persons who didn't pay into social security in two years from healthcare access, meaning not only that unemployed and undocumented persons lose healthcare but also that housewives have to register on their husbands' health card in order to receive medical care⁷. The cutting of child benefits, family support and childcare facilities makes women bear the brunt of austerity measures, in turn forcing them to draw more on their own families (particularly on women but also on pensioners and children⁸ therein) for care. The effects of neoliberal precarity and austerity regimes on forms of reproduction and care are considerable, meaning not just that 'families become important again' but that very specific kinds of family are in fact produced.

If we follow Emmanuel Todd in his study of family forms across the world and ages⁹, then nuclear models of family have always prevailed. In its basic definition, a nuclear family is one composed of a heterosexual couple and their child/ren: a suitable model for survival in most times and places, making for manageable and mobile economic and social units. In the modern west, the nuclear family is inextricably connected to the modelling of social reproduction upon the bourgeois household of the 19th century, as economically and socially competitive unit. Therein, capital is key: children grow to be like parents as the family upholds and accumulates wealth and status (through more or less subtle internal hierarchies and obligations) in a relatively enclosed way. This has been the ideal type of 'family' for some centuries now, and the industrial family of the 20th century (with its nuclear structure, clear division of labour and economic dependency of women on men) as much as the contemporary entrepreneurial family

⁷ See 'Yo sí, Sanidad Universal', a Spanish campaign against the dismantling of universal healthcare, and also Zechner, M. (2012) *Fuer einen zivilgesellschaftlichen Rettungsplan* (2012), Interview with Spanish Activists, in: *Kulturrisse* 3/2012. Vienna.

⁸ Williams, R. (2010) '700,000 children acting as carers, survey shows', *The Guardian*, 10th November 2010.

⁹ Todd, E. (2011), *L'origine des systemes familiaux*, Volume 1: Eurasia. Paris: Gallimard.

(wherein women and men strive for careers and economic equality, whilst reproductive work is still majorly a woman's matter, possibly outsourced to maids) try to embody it, even if it is hard to attain in times of fracturing and faltering employment and social support.

Other forms and models of family however exist aplenty outside of the capitalist west. There are those who cannot even imagine to aspire to bourgeois nuclear family life, because they have no capital or land to preserve through it. There are also contexts wherein other ways of living together still prevail and capital has not taken centre stage, even if these are increasingly rare. What I am concerned with here is the former case, given the ways in which precarity and austerity shift the bourgeois nuclear model out of sight, potentially radicalizing kinship and support practices. Where the family can't be an agent of saving and accumulation, it may either collapse into itself in efforts of conservation, or take on more communal forms as a broad network of support. Again the question is how to avert the former in favour of the latter through building radical cultures and networks of support.

In contexts of precarity and subalternity, it often takes more than two to build a viable support network: the family without capital often seems messy and patch(work)y, functioning not to preserve and maintain wealth and prestige but to facilitate everyday survival. The patchwork families emerging after the 1960s might be a symptom of women's liberation and welfare access to some extent, speaking of experiments with new ways of practicing support and care, but they are also expressions of what happens when precarious workers assemble to make families, needing to puzzle relations and occupations together rather than having solid and well-paying jobs to rely on. Those families have not only different relational, economic and ethical arrangements than the bourgeois model, but also different spatial ones. Kinship therein is less conservative, functioning less to preserve than to merely support and share.

Thus the middle and lower class family, 'symbolised by the house of the grand-parents, is a place of social anchorage that allows one to face the insecurity caused by the different forms of urban mobility (professional, residential)',¹⁰. It may have strong nuclear components, but it builds on extensive webs of support, through relatives,

¹⁰ Fonseca, C. (1997), *Review of 'La famille en Europe. Parenté et perpétuation familiale'*. In: *L'Homme*, No.144, EHESS. p.224

communities and the state. The nuclear family that doesn't depend on a support network is a (highly recurrent) bourgeois fantasy: where welfare states are said to have made this come true, it is worth looking again. If welfare state policies have enabled women to shift more childcare away from the married couple and biological family, it has never been to the point of making do without mothers, families and friends. Rather these 'supporters' have allowed women to have a break from patriarchal relations and build other kinds of families out of necessity and/or desire. The argument that welfare dismantles family cohesion appears flawed on several accounts¹¹: depending on cultural circumstances, it strengthens different kinds of families. Yet besides welfare, the privileging of heterosexual and income-safe couples for marriage, adoption and as debtors still promotes a certain nuclear model above all.

Militant networks and families?

Through and beyond these questions of nuclear, heterosexual and well-to-do families, I want to question social reproduction in relation to social movements here, asking how and under what conditions the form and concept of 'family' can come to support militant networks and make them durable¹². In this context, the question concerns the coming of age of a generation of social movement actors and the sustainability of militancy. 'If you're not a commie before you're 20, you have no heart; if you're not a capitalist after you are 20, you have no brain', goes a saying that someone at a session of the Micropolitics group once shared. How then to avoid ignoring the family, but also how not to naturalise it, just seeing it as something that happens to people and takes its 'natural' course? Clearly, as much as reproduction can seem to be an autopiloting biological-affective process (less so in the face of fertility problems), the family is a form shaped and intervened upon by state and market. If not for feminist genealogies, it feels like social movements have few analyses and strategies to offer on this matter.

Reclaim the family?

In May 2012, the month of its first anniversary, the Spanish 15M movement launched 'toma la familia'¹³, a small campaign to 'Reclaim the family'. Following various 'toma' leitmotifs – 'toma la plaza' (the initial May 2011 slogan), 'toma la huelga' (of the strike

¹¹ See Zimmerman, S. L. (1991), *The Welfare State and Family Breakup: The Mythical Connection*. *Journal of Family Relations*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 139-147

¹² Beyond the individual support people in a network get from their own family.

¹³ See this article reporting the birth of 'Toma la familia': Sanz Paratcha, Diego (2012) 'En esta familia cabe más gente', *Diagonal Periodico*, 26 May 2012, Madrid.

in March 2012), and so forth – this ‘reclaiming’, ‘taking back’ or ‘taking over’ was possibly the most daring proposal of the movement as yet. The reclaiming not just of public institutions and spaces, traditional forms of workers resistance, or private entities such as banks and businesses, but also of the very platforms of everyday reproduction poses as much of a challenge to movements now as it will to capital if successful. And it promises to open up a new terrain of transversal struggle.

The context of ‘toma la familia’ is an *unheimlich* yet familiar one: the combination of a brutal dismantling of mutualist safety nets (social services, institutions, rights) combined with the neo-conservative discourses and policies of a right wing austerity government, as privy to many a government in Europe¹⁴. Not only do those policies (questioning abortion rights¹⁵, tightening immigration laws, cutting child benefits, introducing workfare¹⁶, taking away migrants access to healthcare¹⁷) undo key achievements of feminist and decolonial struggles and enforce free labour, which as ever falls back onto women and those with no capital and fragile legal status – they also promote a conservative-bourgeois family model that hardly corresponds to what people in precarious and subaltern positions inhabit or may want to inhabit. It takes only a pinch of feminist sensitivity to perceive a huge threat and pending social disaster here.

Yet this generation of feminists goes beyond a mere politics of rejection. While the 15M activists affirm that ‘the nuclear family is radioactive’¹⁸, they also affirm ‘the family as refuge, as space of care and personal development, and most obviously in this context of crisis where many people lose their jobs and homes... the family again sustains many poor people.’¹⁹ The ambivalence of this problem, as of many other problems relating to precarity²⁰, requires an inventive approach rather than moralizing or purist theories. As the same woman from the 15M Feminisms says: ‘family is not only your husband and

¹⁴ For some background on Spanish neoconservative and catholic family discourses, see Sanchez Aroca, I. (2012) ‘Recetas “antielección” para salir de la crisis’, *Diagonal Periodico*, 24 May 2012, Madrid.

¹⁵ As the Rajoy government planned to do in Spain in 2012 (August 2012). See Zechner, M. (2012) ‘Prekaritaet ist das Verhuetungsmittel der Zukunft’.

¹⁶ The UK conservatives have probably put in place the most extreme workfare of Europe so far. See the ‘Boycott Workfare’ Campaign.

¹⁷ In Spain, the Rajoy government came up with a decree (16.2012) excluding under 26-year olds who haven’t paid into social security in the past 2 years, from access to the healthcare system. This excludes a huge host of people who can’t or don’t do documented work: migrants, housewives, the unemployed. See Zechner, M. (2012) ‘Fuer einen zivilgesellschaftlichen Rettungsplan’.

¹⁸ See Tomalaplaza Blog (2012) ‘La familia nuclear es radioactiva’.

¹⁹ See the Blog of the Sol Acampada.

²⁰ Armano, E. (2011) *Notes on Some Features of Knowledge Work*.

your kids, it could also be your friendships, your pets or your housemates or lovers [...] not the rejection of the nuclear family, because our idea is not to go around saying “we don’t like the nuclear family”, anyone should be able to choose what kind of family they want[...]’²¹. Here the pro-choice argument gets applied to the family, affirming that every woman (and person in general) should have the right to choose whether and what kind of family s/he wants, thus underpinning struggles for welfare and services – and at the same time is articulated with the invention of other families, with hijacking the family model.

The 15M Feminists speak of the ‘affective family’ in this context: ‘we did a campaign where everyone could visualize what their family was... that your family isn’t just your husband or your kids, it can be your friendships, your pet toys, those you live with or whoever else you choose...’²² It is worthwhile paying more attention to the way the care networks of precarious people extend towards friends. Particularly in social movement contexts, there is much experimentation around putting resources and spaces in common in ways that build new kinds of relations of dependency and conviviality (see Chapter C3)²³. Whether it is out of need or choice – which are often less distinguishable than one might think – the tightly knit, heteronormative nuclear model is at odds with the cultures of extended, fragmented or displaced families, those that have little financial power to pass on, those steeped in precarity, those operating as transnational care chains and networks, those with feminist or anticapitalist ethics and so forth.

Inevitably, processes of re-inventing social reproduction and thus modes of building care networks are under way in the context of crisis, grounding new struggles around the commons and subsistence as well as new governmental measures to make families pay for financial-fiscal crises. In the face of the ‘care’ side of current crises, and as part of undoing the mutualism of public care, the Austrian county of Styria may have set a trend: it reintroduced a previously abandoned law that obliges (ex-)spouses and children to pay for substantial parts of their partners/parents elderly care²⁴. In the context of debt

²¹ Interview with Marcela, Nov 2012, Madrid. Partly published in Zechner, M. (2012) ‘Prekaritaet ist das Verhuetungsmittel der Zukunft’.

²² Ibid.

²³ See also Zechner, M. (2013), Precarity, Militancy and Family-Networks. Parallax Journal (forthcoming 2013)

²⁴ See for instance Kleine Zeitung (2011), ‘Pflegerregress: So viel muessen die Steirer zahlen’, 29.07.2011.

economies, it is easy to see how the moral and legal responsabilization of the family for the cutting of public services may become norm²⁵. The family is thus a major site on which the destruction of mutualist systems comes to weigh. Reclaiming it from below, on the level of micropolitical experimentations as well as macropolitical struggles for social rights, is crucial when austerity meets new politics of debt and free labour.

The (neo)liberal family

How might we understand the political role of families, and their relation to the state, in recent centuries in the West? Jacques Donzelot, in his book on ‘The policing of families’²⁶, draws on a Foucauldian framework and French context in order to trace the becoming of the family within liberal governmentality, recognizing that this organisational unit is far from being socially outdated or politically irrelevant.

Until around the first revolution in France, under the *ancien régime* of sovereign power and social misery, a politics of charity and assistance had tried to calm poverty – and, more importantly the social uprisings it caused – via institutions of gratuity and hospitalisation. Thus indigents and paupers were kept at bay and separate from the social fabric (where they may lead to rebellion, as in the storming of the Bastille) and from their families (which could not sustain them). In this context, families were somewhat autonomous political-economic units under patriarchal guise:

Under the *ancien régime*, the family was both a subject and an object of government. It was subject by virtue of the internal distribution of its powers: the wife, the children, and the other members of the household (relatives, servants, apprentices) were answerable to the head of the family. Through him, the family was inscribed within groups with a common adherence, whether in the form of *networks of solidarity*, as in the case of the corporations and village communities, or *blocks of dependence* of the feudal or religious type, or more often, both at once. The family thus constituted a *plexus* of dependent relations that were indissociably private and public, a social linkage that organised individuals around the possession of an *état* (at the same time a trade or

²⁵ See also Gleckman, H. (2012) ‘Will Adult Children Have to Pay Mom’s Nursing Home Costs?’, Forbes, 16 May 2012.

²⁶ Ibid.

profession, a privilege, and a status) which was granted and recognized by larger social groupings. Hence it was the smallest political organisation possible.²⁷

At the end of 18th century, this autonomy of families became a threat to the state, which saw increasing revolts of poor and working classes that could no longer sustain their families. In the post-revolutionary period there was a gradual shift away from the economically inefficient politics of charity, which had proceeded by giving gifts without however correcting people, creating a long lasting (and expensive) dependence on the state without rendering these subjects productive.

Thus towards the 19th century, families come under a regime of *saving*, with the liberal state dismantling charity and averting the installation of guaranteed forms of assistance, towards forms of philanthropy that instruct, oblige and self-responsibilise people and families (culminating in new governmental paradigms of the third sector and manufactured civil society in the neo-liberal era, as I explore in section C). The liberal state produces independent subjects that it can govern via moral and economic guidance and coercion, and to this purpose introduces various dispositifs: this is the shift from sovereign power to biopolitics that Foucault described in his work. New technologies of the subjectivation become key to governance – in Britain, the proposal of ‘self-help’ is exemplary in this respect²⁸. In this moment, families become objects of state control and management in a new way. In the family,

[...] the context was found in which to place the necessary construction of public services and facilities without their undermining the liberal definition of the state. [...] It can already be noted that these two axes of the philanthropic strategy replaced the ancient techniques of sovereign power with new forms of positive power: effective advice rather than humiliating charity, the preserving norm rather than destructive repression. [...] If the discourse on the morality of saving was able to function, this was not primarily because workers were compelled to deposit a portion of their meagre resources in savings accounts [...] but because this saving enabled them to achieve a greater *family autonomy* in relation to the blocks of dependence or networks of solidarity that continued

²⁷ Ibid, p.48

²⁸ See Smiles, S. (1859), Self-Help. London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit.

to exist after a fashion.²⁹

Care networks and families are political matters in this sense, not just because ‘the personal is political’ or because of their internal power dynamics, but because they constitute formations within which subsistence, resistance and education occur. The liberal family model works to decompose the forms of collective feasting and celebration that held together community and enabled collective resistance, towards private units of survival. The ways in which this development hinges on the role of women is complex:

If the hygienist norms pertaining to the rearing, labour and education of children were able to take effect, this was because they offered children, and correlatively women, the possibility of increased autonomy within the family in opposition to *patriarchal authority*³⁰.

Women’s striving for autonomy is a strong force in the development of family politics, and the liberal model has integrated some demands and desires of feminists towards its own interests (and as we witness with the politics of gender mainstreaming today, rarely unambiguously). Being subordinate and subaltern within the capitalist, patriarchal and postcolonial order, women as much as poor and black people often cannot afford to refuse the dodgy compromises brought to them by governments, lords or husbands. Thus the state (and the philanthropic and commercial instances connected to it) takes up various desires for liberation and convert them towards an economic rationality: the neo/liberal subject emerges.

In the neoliberal present, families are seen to become ever more self-reflexive and enclosed: the bourgeois model blends with the entrepreneurialism of the time when upper middle classes become subject-objects of family branding and management³¹. The development of new governmental-clinical dispositifs related to psychoanalysis, family planning and counselling in the 20th century has made the family itself the locus of social problem-solving – troublesome children, dysfunctional marriages, criminality, violence or just signs of potential discord are more or less preventively managed via the

²⁹ Ibid, p.57

³⁰ Ibid, pp.57-58

³¹ Feiler, B. (2013) ‘Family Inc’. Wall Street Journal Online, 10th February 2013.

relational techniques of psychology and psychoanalysis. Thus the family becomes an internally governed object, to a large extent self-governing with the help of some technicians (psychoanalysts for wealthier families, counsellors and social workers for poorer ones). The family becomes subject-object of functional, efficient and self-driven government which however still needs to justify itself in the face of broader social norms: abnormal personalities of family members, whether hyper-active, lethargic, cynical, rebellious or depressed, are to immediately enter the therapeutic circuit. Relationship counselling, family psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, cognitive behavioural therapies and so forth: all relationships become matters of technical intervention by the self and expert helpers (who may be private or state employed).

In the context of the neoliberal therapeutic society³², economic rationality thus comes to invest the family not only as an organisation of wealth and human resources – via saving and population control, for instance – but also the very subjectivities within it. Therapeutics serve to make subjects more functional, productive and healthy, keeping costs to the state minimal while maximising profits to be drawn from human ‘resources’ and their habits of consumption. As an article recounts of a troubled US family that ‘turned to a cutting-edge program called agile development that has rapidly spread from manufacturers in Japan to start-ups in Silicon Valley. It is a system of group dynamics in which workers are organized into small teams, hold daily progress sessions and weekly reviews.’ The happy dad is quoted to proudly assert that ‘Having weekly family meetings increased communication, improved productivity, lowered stress and made everyone much happier to be part of the family team.’³³ This is certainly a more masculinist and rare example of family management and intervention, more commonly embodied through therapy and counselling, where a ‘specialist prescribes and the mother executes’ (Donzelot).

The family as organisational form transforms: with neoliberalism, it moves beyond moral and vertical paradigms towards more open and networked forms: frequent divorces as well as re-marriages, patchwork families, transnational families, queer families... Beyond the conservative calls for a return to more moralist, patriarchal and tightly contained forms, what happens to the family in the context of competitive

³² See: Espai en Blanc (2007) *La sociedad terapéutica*, Espai Issue 3-4, Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra and Espai en Blanc.

³³ Feiler, B. (2013) ‘Family Inc.’

individualization? Donzelot points out that in the late liberal context, halfway into the 20th century, we witness an intensification and over-investment in family life, which incorporates a normalisation and disempowerment of the family vis a vis society and the state, making it the ‘troubled site of social subjection’.³⁴

This is the advanced liberal family, then: a residue of feudalism whose internal and external contours are blurred through the effect of an intensification of its relations and a contractualization of its bonds: a sort of endless whirl in which the standard of living, educational behaviour, and the concern with sexual and emotional balance lead one another around in an upward search that concentrates the family a little more on itself with every turn; an unstable compound that is threatened at any moment with defection by its members, owing to that relational feverishness which exposes them to the temptations of the outside, as well as to that overvaluing of the inside which makes escape all the more necessary; a half-open place [...]³⁵

Poignant words in that they echo the notion that no return is every possibly when it comes to family, yet still this half-open place remains a point of anchorage as much as escape. The question that interests me here is: when is the family a threat and when a slave to neoliberal governance? Beyond their defection, are there any promising imaginaries and practices of family within precarious militant cultures? Does the construction of collective resources and support networks of precarious people today have anything to gain from referring to the family, and if so, what? The answers are not straightforward, as Donzelot indicates:

Neither destroyed nor piously preserved, the family is an agency whose incongruity with respect to social requirements can be reduced, or made functional, through the establishment of a procedure that brings about a ‘floating’ of social norms and family values, just as there is established, concurrently, a functional circularity between the social and the economic: Freud and Keynes together.³⁶

³⁴ Donzelot, J. (1979 [1977]). *The Policing of families*. US: Random House. p.227

³⁵ Ibid, p.228-229

³⁶ Ibid, p.8

Many an analysis of the ways in which network cultures bring together the social and economic comes to mind. To resist and invent alternative forms of life within this system might mean to use the network and its creative and caring potential subversively, in view of autonomous forms of community and family.

The family as vehicle of struggles for autonomy

While it is most intuitive to associate the family with troublesome heteronomy in our societies, the challenge here will be to investigate subversions of the traditional, blood based family in view of building autonomy. Between unit of resistance and subsistence, and mechanism of capitalist capture, the family as relational plexus allows for a host of subversions – I will here point to an Argentinian example of circumventing the traditional, blood based family in view of building autonomy. I refer here to a singular popular context in Florencio Varela, a suburb of Buenos Aires, where collectivity and militancy meet the family in inspiring ways. A self-organised and self-built ‘Community Health Centre’ emerged there, out of the unemployed movement of 2001 and maintaining a political practice of autonomy that is infused with sensitivities from indigenous as well as women’s struggles. Beyond the technologies of roadblocks, this space was one of powerful subjectivations and communal experimentation, as Francisco Ferrara points out.³⁷

The health centre consists of two self-made buildings, within which communal meals, workshops in herbalism, medicine, social psychology, dance, arts and crafts as well as community organising meetings happen. It entails a leather workshop where shoes and bags are recycled for sale, as well as a radio antenna for community broadcasts, and is linked to a patch of land a half hour’s drive away where organic vegetables are grown collectively. Health is here understood not as a matter of individual bodies and interventions, but as a matter of gaining control over food production and combating the heavy pollution of water, air and soil of the suburb. As some women of the centre recount their collective process, reflecting on themselves in the terms of family comes quite naturally (likely to do with the proximity of liberation theology and eco-feminism, and a tradition of militancy that easily includes ‘compañero/as’ as part of the community and family), as does reference to the complementary figure of the network

³⁷ Ferrara, F. (2003) Mas alla del Corte de Rutas.

(likely due to the strong links to international militant networks and the thriving of network politics in the 2000s):

Neca: Yes, this was a big family. Not in the traditional style, because you know the traditional family has its own [particularities]...it was very hierarchical, very authoritarian, with some authoritarian roles, you know... Mama and Papa often got into deep shit [...] [laughs] And luckily, today this idea disappeared: there are children that can say what they think and that can make decisions at home too... and well, that's what the health centre is like. I think it is a collective practice that opened itself up, instead of being influenced by the hierarchical style of the family...I think the health centre was an influence in democratization, horizontality and openness: this exogamic aspect of the family... [laughs]

Me: A huge family, that is... how many people in this extended family?

Neca: Thousands.

Maba: We are... it is really difficult to count because there are those of us who come to work in the health centre, those that work in the fields, and at the same time we have networks with other collectives that do the same, and we help each other, we accompany each other mutually, so it becomes difficult to delimit where one collective starts and where another stops... and that's wonderful, to belong to such a big network that struggles and self-organises, it is really very beautiful.³⁸

This account of care networks and notions of family subverts the model of the bourgeois family – an economically autonomous mini-institution that saves people from relying on the state, via its savings (or debts) – that liberal politics imposes on its subjects. It also undoes the individualized therapeutic model whereby pragmatic and preventive treatment of relations occurs via individual effort, without bearing any relation to broader collective and social problems and politics. While there are no doubt traces of Christian ethics in this vision – where there is the family, there is often also the church – they go beyond pastoral, caritative and patriarchal visions towards liberatory

³⁸ Interview with members of Community Health Centre, Florencio Varela, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. April 2012. My translation from Spanish.

approaches of self-organisation and horizontality. Indeed one of the key figures in the Solano movement is a radical priest who participated in popular roadblocks and supported the occupation of his parishes' buildings by people from the local unemployed movement at the end of the 1990s (leading to their eviction and his excommunication)³⁹.

How to think autonomy in the context of radical and popular care networks? What are possible ways out of the self-referentiality and normalisation of the liberal family as much as of the militant network, towards forms of reproduction capable of generating heterogeneity and autonomy? As Neca and Maba recount:

We gained autonomy. We always fought, obviously, to be able to benefit from the resources that the government offered, but at the same time we sustained our autonomy and the administration of everything by ourselves...of everything. Of all the...I'm not sure if 'aid' is the most adequate word...of all that came from the government. And the government offered it precisely because we had previously demanded it, by organising, through struggles/battles [luchas] in the street...⁴⁰

Members of the health centre have developed their own practice and notion of autonomy, which consists neither in fitting the molds of state assistance, nor in performing the family as bourgeois enterprise that molds liberal subjects, but in a militant practice that both contests state policy and produces popular subsistence and solidarity. It is through their history of piquetero struggle that these people won a certain autonomy from the state, not absolute independence but the rights to locally administer the resources they are due:

We already had a history of struggle, of winning self-organisation and self-management of all the [government support] schemes, of the subsidies that the government introduced, we could sustain our form of work...we could sustain ourselves...or continue to do what we had already been doing since a long time, because the other people who formed cooperatives always had to depend on what the local councils or the government decided, or the political party to

³⁹ See Spagnolo, A. and Gilia, M.E. (2002) *Crisis en Argentina: Sacerdote y piquetero*. Interview with the militant and priest Alberto Spagnolo. Lafogata Blog. My translation from Spanish.

⁴⁰ Interview with Community Health Centre.

which they belonged.⁴¹

This account illustrates a collective take on the state as well as the everyday. It offers a perspective on how access to welfare not only originates from collective struggle but how its administration and configuration can remain sites of common discussion, organising and contestation.

Such practices fly in the face of the way the liberal familial mechanism plays individual interests against family interests by forcing people through tutelary institutions and threatening benefit loss. Donzelot describes the new tutelary mechanisms in their subtlety, showing how

[...] *claims* procedures could be substituted for networks of solidarity. These are the things that made the family into the essential figure of our societies, into the indispensable correlate of parliamentary democracy. From this fact, one can also see how the problem of the twentieth century was to be, not the defence or abolition of the institution of the family, but the resolution of the questions that arose at the two trouble spots of the juncture between family and society: (1) How to cope successfully with family resistances and individual deviations in the working classes in such a way that the necessary intervention does not generate excessive advantages or overly harsh repression and thus cause the old forms of dependence or organic solidarity to reappear (the tutelary complex); (2) How to achieve the maximum harmony between the principle of family authority, its egoisms and specific aspirations, and the procedures of socialization of its members (the regulation of images).⁴²

Questions of subjectivity, struggle and subsistence meet to make the family an urgent subject and object of reflection. Neither families nor democracy and institutions are static forms, but rather processual territories: it is not a matter of taking or leaving them so much as inventing and subverting them. Speaking from the experience of the MTD Solano, the priest Alberto Spagnolo is adamant that ‘the point is not to take power, but to construct it. [...] When power doesn’t come through a process, through an evolution,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Donzelot, J. (1979 [1977]). *The Policing of families*. pp.94-95

it is impossible.⁴³ The Solano context is a powerful example of how to reclaim networks of solidarity without losing one's claim on democratic institutions and resource distribution, maintaining a critical and subtle definition of autonomy as well as heteronomy. How to project this towards other, perhaps more global contexts? Before returning to questions of power and autonomy-heteronomy in section C, we now move towards considering families, care and struggle from the viewpoint of migration.

Global families: connecting the dots across chains and networks

Just as democracy cannot be thought on the national level only in the context of globalisation, neither can support networks: the family, like other associational forms, has transformed in relation to globalising forces. How to think about the arrangements of family that emerge through contemporary practices of migration and mobility? What are the networks and extended families that we build across our places of belonging? And what to make of the fact that for most people coming from poorer regions to richer ones, migration eventually entails a shift from one family model to another, often from more extended models to variants of the nuclear family?

As Emmanuel Todd points out in relation to the historical timeframe running from the 16/17th century to the present in European countries such as England and France, there is certainly a reason for 'the emergence of capitalism in the [geographical-historical] zone of the nuclear [family], since this family type enables the social flexibility that's indispensable to the uprooting of peasants as well as the individual mobility necessary for technological experimentation.'⁴⁴ The enclosure of commons and concomitant urbanisation, marking several waves of primitive accumulation coming at different times in different places, makes nuclear forms the most suitable for the survival of small and competitive units of possessive individualism⁴⁵. If obviously our forms of reproduction adapt to capitalism, then what of mutant forms of reproduction that form across global capitalist worlds - can subversive monstrous family assemblages be seen across transitional migrant and/or precarious networks?

The second-wave privatisation and capture of home and reproductive time ('care crisis')

⁴³ Spagnolo, A. and Gilia, M.E. (2002) *Crisis en Argentina*.

⁴⁴ Todd, E. (2011), *L'origine des systemes familiaux*, Volume 1. p.18

⁴⁵ See Mc.Pherson, C.B (2011), *The political theory of Possessive Individualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

in the global north intensely mobilises informal and illegalized care provision, producing so-called migrant ‘care chains’, where a family member (mostly a woman/mother) in a poor situation migrates to make money for her family, as a care worker in a richer household. Accounts by migrant care workers often illustrate the blurring of their own family (back home) with that of their employer. The resulting ambivalence is not unlike that of immaterial cooperative labour, where relations are often equally complex in their entangling of intimacy and exploitation-competition. How to think of the networks that emerge from such ambivalent contexts of contemporary precarious and subaltern employment: spaces of care to be built on, or flawed semblances of familiarity?

Helma Lutz asks in her study of the ambivalences of migrant domestic work: ‘Does domestic work amount to cooperation among ‘kin by choice’, characterized by reciprocal trust, or is it a particular kind of exploitation in which the employer expects to be shown respect but, for her part, need only pay the scantest regard to the subordinate’s position?’⁴⁶. She answers this question in pointing to the irreducibility of such care work to either:

Various of our case studies have shown that the relationships between the parties involved are extremely complex, and cannot be shoehorned into a straightforward exploiter-exploitee schema. Moreover, the egalitarian tenets of present-day Western society are ingrained in these relations [...]. It is clear from the mutual uncertainty regarding modes of address and designation (female friend, sister, daughter or partner) that drawing uncritical parallels with historical precursors is not a tenable option, since the hierarchies of the master/servant society have no place in a modern habitus. But at the same time it is a working relationship characterized by multiple interlocking asymmetries, which cannot simply be ignored.⁴⁷

It may be useful to relate this way of paying attention to the singular configurations of relations that such highly ‘embedded’ work implies towards the asymmetries and ambivalences proper to contemporary creative work. While forms of commitment and engagement in such constellations vary, they often become lasting sites of inhabitation,

⁴⁶ Lutz, H. (2011). *The new maids*. p.79

⁴⁷ Lutz, H. (2011). *Exploitation or alliance of trust? Relationship work in the household*, in *Ibid*, p.110

sites of 'real' life.

In a chapter on 'transnational motherhood', Lutz emphasizes the need for a new way of looking at families - pointing to the fact that only 15% of all families in 1990s Britain lived in classic, traditional nuclear family formations (two heterosexual parents with dependent children), with numbers decreasing (divorce rates rise). Traditional nuclear models are giving in to new forms, yet under what conditions will they go beyond the mom that's at home or works three jobs, and the dad who's a breadwinner or unemployed? Looking at migration and precarity may perhaps help see ways of negotiating extended and transnational work-life networks through solidarity and care.

Lutz argues that far from dissolving families, migratory projects of mothers very much hold families together: 'constant mobility accompanied by networking among community members across wide geographical distances can enable them to maintain a functional community and create collective identity.'⁴⁸ In the first instance of consolidating a network, this surely is the case. However according to Lutz, it is not just about preserving existing configurations: a 'more collective sense of family' emerges, whereby aunts and other family members take on parenting functions, while friends and even employers may take on a role supportive of one's family. At least for a generation or two, migrant networks radically extend support networks locally and translocally. This is why Lutz argues for a new definition of family that can show how

the current concept of the family as problematic because it prescribes a legal, moral and biological concept of relatedness, which ignores precisely those aspects which are most important in people's everyday lives, namely *commitment, involvement, loyalty, care, and self-obligation*. [...] Accordingly, families must be seen as a constellation of ideas, images or technologies, which serve to ascribe domestic meaning to everyday life.⁴⁹

Elective kinship and other kinds of pacts

These contemporary definitions of family indeed ring of the ways in which people within feminist-Autonomist groups and networks understand their affiliations. The desire for marriages between friends, for 'other kinds of pacts' (Nizaia), for ways of

⁴⁸ Lutz, H. (2011). *The new maids*. p.113

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.116

committing to each other beyond projects or jobs, speaks of a desire for another kind of belonging, normativity and family. As Pantxo puts it:

[...] there is the neoliberal structure which is about opportunism and individualism – that would be ‘what guarantees my safety is money, it is not networks, it is not belonging’ and somehow the network of political projects are opening a new space but that’s on a much more precarious level. On the other hand you see that with passing years, people who invested more and more time in these networks were also forced to be respectful to the network, respectful to the ethics of the network. And so that was the way in which we are starting to give a normativity, a positive norm, not a constricting normativity but a constructing normativity, an instituting practice of that space. We are instituting networks of care and the fact that people are spending their time, their energy and renouncing other possibilities – of making money for instance – in the name of strengthening this network, which in capitalistic terms is an immeasurable dimension of stability⁵⁰.

The imagination of sharing resources and spaces across groups, clusters of friends and even across regional and national borders as it occurs in many social movement circles, resembles the way many families organise transnationally. It takes into account the ambivalences of contemporary work/life and the potential transformations of acquired families, while involving commitment, involvement, loyalty, care, and self-obligation. Yet at the same time, such care networks are perhaps not quite meant to statically last forever, to replicate the strong normativity of biological and traditional families. In the context of migration and mobility, care networks also need to constitute an opening, ways out of impasses or oppressive situations that still build on shared responsibility and respect. The families we see ourselves living within need to remain open to change, as a German activist-teacher-performer living in London says:

I always speak about my friends as family... [...] some families moved because of people moving away, because London was always, and will always be a place of movement, wasn’t it. And some families, they got too tight – I have this sense that I might feel the need of moving away from families also, because the

⁵⁰ Interview with Pantxo.

dynamics get too tight and they get too automatized also, so it is really difficult to break them – and for me that’s really important, that there’s space for things to be broken and changed.⁵¹

Emerging from these observations is a sense of belonging and care that is strongly tied to an ethos of creativity and movement. This sense of common or community refuses tree-like affiliations with claims to eternity, while trying to institute sustainable ways of cohabitation and collaboration. And yet it is also sensitive to the more rigid affiliations of the biological family, appreciating the stability found therein. Lutz: ‘Comparative cross-cultural anthropological studies on childcare and upbringing have, for example, drawn attention to the fact that concepts of family, motherhood and childhood are not subject to any universally valid definition but follow specific cultural patterns.’⁵² What kinds of cultures may enable for care networks that can harbour children and sick as well as old people?

We touch upon cultures of elective kinship here. Queer families and gay communities have been key experimental sites for elective kinship, and inspire attempts at practicing ways of doing childcare, love relationships and family beyond heteronormative norms. As one book on queer families puts it: ‘The subjective agency implicit in gay kinship surfaced in the very labels developed to describe it: “families *we* choose”, “families *we* create”. In the language of significant others, significance rested in the eye of the beholder.’⁵³ Much like the network, the non-blood-based family is perceived, felt and enacted by people in differing ways: there is not necessarily a norm to when some people become ‘family’. Such belonging can emerge through subtle processes of conviviality and cooperation and takes on its own performative effects once proclaimed, can be moulded to accommodate others. What defines family to the interviewees here is a commitment to care, friendship and a shared everyday, and indeed a sensitivity or closeness to queer cultures. An older militant in the 15M movement, Marga imagines new constellations of care:

I see that I’m old, going towards old age and death, and for me the support I can

⁵¹ Interview with Nizaia, Barcelona, November 2011.

⁵² Lutz, H. (2011). *The new maids*. p.114

⁵³ Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose : lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York, Columbia University Press. p.109

get from my son is compatible with the support I can get from my friendships, from within more horizontal spaces of cooperation. I think we still don't have a model we can stick to, and in that sense all these experimentations are good. From coming back to form families by decision – that is, I decide that you are my daughter and you decide that I'm your daughter and that's how we'll live, we'll make that deal – I wouldn't see why that shouldn't be. Or we decide that we'll be husband and wife but, whatever... an old lady with her female neighbour, for instance – we'll decide that we two women, we are husband and wife. I don't see why not... as I told you, we still haven't found the way, we are still in experimental phase... and for it to work... you have to have I don't know how many experiments in order to have one that works, to make that jump towards how we want to live. And so for me, cooperation is very important.⁵⁴

Friendships are often the base of building lasting relationships of trust and cooperation, particularly where the autopilot of the heterosexual reproduction isn't given.

Experimentations with polyamory and open relationships are often platforms for imagining other kinds of care networks, as one queer polyamory article points out:

In the queer communities I'm in, valuing friendship is a really big deal, often coming out of the fact that lots of us don't have family support, and build deep supportive structures with other queers. We are interested in resisting the heteronormative family structure in which people are expected to form a dyad, marry, have kids, and get all their needs met within that family structure. A lot of us see that as unhealthy, as a new technology of post-industrial late capitalism that is connected to alienating people from community and training them to think in terms of individuality, to value the smaller unit of the nuclear family rather than the extended family.⁵⁵

Before and beyond the post-industrial, the liberal family alienates people from broader collectivities, yet indeed post-Fordist modes of work and life add some extra challenges to building lasting collective projects and relations.

I wish to carefully propose that a process of imagining other kinds of families, inspired

⁵⁴ Interview with Marga.

⁵⁵ Spade, Dean (precise date unknown, in the 2000s), *For Lovers and Fighters*. Makezine.

by queer and migrant experiences, may be underway in some social movements. If we understand family as a space of commitment, mutual support and love that enables people to collectively raise children and care for old people, then why shouldn't social movements be able to bring them forth? Beyond merely blood-based, hierarchical, patriarchal or local models of family lies an urgency to find desirable ways of reproducing the everyday. The reproductive crisis of capitalism adds quite some fuel to this urgency. Not an obvious task, yet the alternatives are hardly enticing: lonely and miserable ways of ageing in the absence of proper welfare, pensions, public spaces and institutions, or the enclosed and competitive nuclear family.

Neither the family where daddy goes to work, nor the one where mummy has three jobs and yet no access to benefits: the promise of transforming 'work' towards something more meaningful and self-organised than wage labour is a fruit of the network form, which there may be much more to reap from if engaged from the perspective of reproduction. The promise of freeing housework from its dark life-long kitchens is just as important as that of loosening the grip of the wage if in the struggle for desirable ways of integrating life and work.

We've seen that when it comes to understanding social reproduction and the possibilities for struggle around it, the family is key. This chapter has illustrated how the family is not a form separate from social life and struggles but an indispensable term of it, making it urgent to rethink it in the current context of crisis. We've also seen that globalization and new processes of primitive accumulation change the family and the way care is organized: in the next chapter we will pay more attention to this, mapping out how migration and mobility reconfigure care work and concomitantly social reproduction. As part of this, assuming the perspective of social movements as in other chapters, we look at the forms of resistance, commoning and imagination that arise from there. The transnational nature of relations of work and life in our age make it urgent to take seriously the experiences, practices and knowledges that migration produces: not just from the point of view of labour, but also from the viewpoint of the forms of life that emerge across territories and social groups. Without conflating migration and mobility – as experiences set in different class, race and gender contexts – the next chapter will shift between analysing what we may call subaltern and precarious network-families in order to trace some problems, intelligences and

sensitivities that emerge across them.

B 3 - Care networks in and beyond the global: migration, commoning, continuity and trust

Migration, networks, families

The condition of migrancy is shared across worlds of post-Fordist labour and care work. Where in the more privileged contexts of knowledge work, movement is addressed as ‘mobility’, it is spoken of as ‘migration’ in the case of subaltern care workers. Taking those differences into account, I will pay attention to the specificity of the migrant condition in constituting the precarious and networked lives I have previously addressed. Precarity, migrancy and networks indeed intertwine in specific ways, and their relations constitute a key challenge to autonomous reproduction and social movements today. Nizaia, who had migrated from Mexico to Spain, describes the situation around Autonomist-feminist social movements in Barcelona in 2011:

I think this is something we spoke about punctually with the esquizo group and in other spaces – one of these things was about work; I think the two topics were housing/homes [vivienda] and work, the two main topics. Many and many of us were migrants at that moment: and that could be migrants from Spain itself, or from Europe, or some of us were from Latin America, so it was a migration that could be from nearby or from farther away, but we all lived that ‘being foreign’ a bit. And so there was always this thing of – between coming and going, feeling that it took a lot to have a more stable common territory. And we were also very afraid of not knowing up to where we could count with the other, because we all lived a bit in this indeterminacy. I knew that I could count on myself, and that the other person probably really wanted to support me and to have me support them, but those then were very temporary pacts, very brief, where very probably

the other would leave and then I could no longer count on them because they'd no longer be around. So this question of housing/home [vivienda] not just as in 'the house' but as in 'how to inhabit'. So that was something that was there, as in... concrete practices of inhabiting. And the other [question] is to do with the precarity of work. To know that we were very fragile but that in any moment we could be left without work, and on top of that, without a network – that at least when you're in your place of origin you have a family-, or somehow older-, network that supports you, but here... that made you a lot more vulnerable. And it was paradoxical if only family ties could be ties that last. That's to say that it seemed that the only thing that could be consistent was the family bond, of blood and all that, or a couple bond. And I remember when I had married – for papers precisely – a friend who is amongst my closest, said: 'I just think we ought to have marriages for friends. I would really like that you and I, that we do a wedding and get married. Because I want you to always be in my life' and I told her, 'Yes of course, I also feel that link with you, where I would like to be able to ask for this kind of commitment. I want a marriage with my friend and I want her to never leave, I want to be able to ask of her to be present'. But within this politics of freedom... well of course, making demands is no good! And it is very difficult, to know how to ask the other to be there...¹

Those new, increasingly common conditions of migrancy provoke a re-thinking of associational forms, notably of the role of the family and of the network, in providing stability. The theories of global care chains describe the ways in which families come to be scattered across the globe, aligned in chain-like formations through which survival is ensured (via the passing down of money and the passing up of care). As I have said before, theories of networks have largely ignored those dimensions of reproduction, yet they tend to be implicitly understood as sites of survival too. New associations and forms of inhabiting relationships emerge, where the family and the network may come to be mixed. As Nelly, who had moved from Germany to the UK some ten years ago, personally recalls:

Yeah, the Greek family period was a really important one [...] these things weren't so easily defined, but I know the Greeks, I spoke about them as family.

¹ Interview with Nizaia.

And then there was the family... my own small family... that came through a really strong relationship. And I sort of tapped into an existing relationship that was already in a kind of family format, and I joined the relationship and we constructed family bonds out of that, because we spent so much time all together. And it is nice to have these families because then the people who are partners of your family, then they become your family too. I remember I really liked to connect different families. Yeah and then there were, I guess, people I lived with, I don't know – we were a family or a network or something, but there was certainly something in there².

Migrant biographies do not necessarily write themselves in the linear mode of filiation, nor are such family-networks easily delimited. Convivialities and solidarities establish themselves according to site and moment, such that consistent relations become difficult while a fluidity of relations permits lives to remain projects (implying both positive and negative aspects). While forms of migrancy and association differ according to class, race and gender, it is sure that with increasing globalization, migrancy comes to be ever more shared across global cities.

Transnational movements, commitment and individualism

For many of the persons I quote from my interviews here, migrancy and mobility are ambivalent matters. While there is appreciation for the new forms of life and collectivity and the enhanced economic and social possibilities that migrating may entail, it is also clear that insecurity and loneliness often make opportunistic behaviour inevitable.

A feeling of being stuck between two unsustainable associational forms emerges – the family and the network. Gabriella is aware of the potential perils of negotiating this tension via an increased identification with groups (political or else), where conviviality always remains structured around work and larger projects, unable to produce commitments in themselves:

[...] all of us were quite individualized, all of us in the group of friends in London, because we weren't committed to anything long term; we didn't have family responsibility, we didn't have older people to care for, we were quite a

² Interview with Nelly.

good prototype of the neoliberal self-entrepreneurial individual: critical, self-reflexive but absolutely free to reinvent themselves all the time without commitment, responsibility. And so the fragility of this is more than the fragility of a more traditional way of owing to each other and being part of the same family, of having social duties almost because of your role, because of your family position. But at the same time, there *were* commitments and we *did* create other forms of expectations between colleagues, between friends, between people sharing political projects maybe. But it is still a kind of commitment that will always forgive... the fact that at some time you will go. It is your choice, you're always free to leave eventually, and actually maybe people would envy you if you manage³.

The care chain and the network integrate with one another to make the specific contradictions of global neoliberal capitalism, expressing themselves via a set of tensions in many people's lives: between mobility and stability, commitment and opportunity, kinship and friendship, work and home (now at a global scale). Care chains run from richest too poorest, in many layers, and often via paid work: from people with busy lives who can afford to hire someone to do part of their reproductive work, to people migrating to make a family income to send back home and themselves having a poor family member or worker take care of their loved ones. In fact these chains have a lot to do with networks, not just because they are absolutely integrated with network paradigms (we may see them as specific and very common lines of power and survival connecting nodes across networks) but also because the neoliberal network paradigm may be seen to have produced them to some extent. Network neoliberalism accelerated the rhythms of life and work of many, making people more mobile and precarious: a sliding scale of displacement according to more or less well paid 'opportunity' and/or a threat of ones given life conditions, running from what I tend to call 'mobile' subjects to 'migrants' here.

We may think of this being part of a shift from an 'old' paradigm of relating (the family, filiation, long-term commitments, savings, inheritance...) to a new one (networks, friends/partners, opportunity, debt and speculation) – in any case the challenge consists in articulating these two paradigms with one another, beyond naïve

³ Interview with Gabriella.

affirmations of the new or old. To be sure, care chains are useful figures for mapping out relations of dependency and commitment across networked worlds, for what it means for assemblages of care to be threatened by the departure of its members, and perhaps also for tracing a politics of migration that is capable of articulating itself across the migrancy and mobility spectrums. In approximating answers and points of reference here, I draw on existing analysis of to remittance transfers⁴, transnational families, migrant labour as well as network theories and critiques of neoliberal opportunism.

As Marga points out, neither the associational models of the network of the chain offer a rich kind of collectivity in contemporary global capitalism, since they both isolate:

Working together in networks [...] was a model that produced a lot of loneliness. Because the effort of connecting has its cost – to maintain oneself connected has its costs in economic, psychic, physical and other terms. If you're not capable of sustaining that, well you'll collapse... you'll be devastated and fall into a very big loneliness, which is the absence of connections.

The model of the chain... obviously no one wants the chain, because in the chain you inhabit a link, and that link comes to you through heredity – so me, for example, at that point, I was a daughter who had old parents and so the model of the chain obliged me to care for my parents – it obliges me whether I want to or not. And many things like that... so you were obviously subjected to some very major exercises of power. Depending on where you happened to fall [into the world], if you dropped in Morocco, well you were up for being a migrant, etc. Obviously, that couldn't be it.⁵

In postcolonial, neoliberal capitalism, we can speak of a crisis of associational forms: the experiences of mobility and migration that constitute two of the main means of contemporary capitalist value extraction (via networks and chains) both ultimately lead to loneliness and exhaustion.

The mobile commons

⁴ See for instance: Datta, K. (2011). New migrant communities and financial services : keeping themselves to themselves? Dorking, Friends Provident Foundation.

⁵ Interview with Marga.

[...] yeah I mean we move... it is never quite fixed, who lives here – people come, and pass, I go...⁶

The notion of mobile commons⁷ describes the ways in which sociability, solidarity and mutual aid play out via projects of migration, which are often organised around family structures. In relation to these subaltern forms of mobile organisation, what forms does the new precariat develop? What long-term commoning practices, as modes of collective solidarity, resistance and ‘counter-saving’, of building pockets of subsistence (and possibly resistance), may come to exist in moments of reproductive crisis? What forms of support networks may allow for resistance to the state to be more sustained and for new forms of social rights to be fought for?

In a book called ‘Escape Routes’, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos develop the concept of ‘mobile commons’ in order to speak about the way people sustain their lives across informal economies, despite and beyond state control and invisibility. They concern themselves mostly with transnational and often paperless migrants, yet their argument can also be seen through the lens of precarity. Transnational migrants are simultaneously surveilled, prosecuted and invisibilised by the state: the less ‘documented’, the less ‘citizen’, the more invisible and also vulnerable they are⁸. Such ways of being at the edge of visibility and legality, of obtaining things by prayer rather than by claim, have much to do with ‘precarity’.

Undocumented migrants are furthest removed from legitimate inhabitation of state systems, living in a parallel world where survival depends on informality, collaboration and mutual support. Therein, mobile commoning functions via flexible practices of sharing and developing knowledges, resources, tools, affects and strategies, relating to being on the move or trying to settle. What Stephenson, Papadopoulos and Tsianos emphasise is that such mobile becoming-common is constructive of other worlds. In their perspective, migration is in itself subversive and thus political, without needing any claim to being a historical political subject: ‘A materialist autonomist perspective

⁶ Interview with Nelly.

⁷ As proposed by the authors of the following book: Papadopoulos, D., N. Stephenson, et al. (2008). *Escape routes : control and subversion in the twenty-first century*. London, Pluto Press.

⁸ Citizenship is a technology for this differentiation, and cannot be made universal as long as differential inclusion is key to sovereign power. See also Papadopoulos, D. & Tsianos, V. (2013). *After citizenship: autonomy of migration, organisational ontology and mobile commons*. *Citizenship Studies*, 17(2), pp.178-196.

on migration is about betraying the discourse of security and citizenship in defence of everyday sociability of mobile people and the worlds they are creating.’⁹ Commoning on the move is a practice that millions of people across the globe build on in the context of global capitalism, and with it new forms of resistance and solidarity emerge.

The more precarious a migration project is, the more it depends on commoning – I would insist on commoning as practice here, since fragile migrant trajectories may still lead into heteronormative and individualised lives. Practices of sharing and self-organising transform subjectivities and politicize everyday life without requiring big words or gestures, producing strong affirmations of autonomy – contrary to student or precarity movements, those of migrant struggle are often less embedded in militant cultures and thus come with less leftist ethos and peer pressure: this makes for the singularity as well as transitory nature of many more organised migrant struggles. In this sense, the process of learning from migration and mobile commoning has much to bring to given struggles around precarity, whilst conversely the more local and on-going organising can ground migrant’s struggles and allow for lines of continuity. The forms of belonging and solidarity emerging here are highly interesting, as this statement by one of the important agents of the 2012/13 Vienna Refugee Protest¹⁰ confirms in an interview from early on in this struggle:

I think that if a refugee or any person has a problem, we need to share it. If we share our problems with each other we will mobilize more and more, and through the mobilisations we can change everything. Because I will share my problems with you, and you will share ours with your friends. And when the time comes when we have to struggle, we will come together, and we will be more powerful.

- *What do you call each other in the camp? Friends, brothers, comrades?*

In the camp, there are a lot of supporters, students and so on; these I call friends. At least right now I don’t have my own family. But here I am proud to say I

⁹ Ibid, p.192

¹⁰ See Vienna Refugee Camp Blog.

have a good family. So when we sit around the campfire and when we start a meeting, I say: I am having a family. I am in a family...¹¹

In joint and transversal struggles such as the one in Vienna¹² – one in a wave of European refugee protests and occupations erupting in Europe in 2012 – the chain and the network, and with it two models of family meet. This is rarely articulated among pure lines of identity, but as embodied tendencies. The politics of unconditional commitment and support for ones kin is mixed with a desire to move and build a new life, in the case of migrant/refugees. For local young activists, this struggle is a key site of commitment, a commitment more unconditional than that of the biological family perhaps. The Austrian welfare state makes it possible for families to exist without the promise of transgenerational care – a condition that enables rather than discourages family continuity in liberal societies. For many of those fleeing from conflict zones in Pakistan, Afghanistan or North Africa, their destiny is immediately economically bound up with that of their family back home, whose survival and security benefits greatly from remittances. In the above account, the notion of brotherly/sisterly comradeship link with that of commitment to kin – both are based in traditions of cultural systems that place specific values on family belonging, and their encounter produces interesting narrations of care in and beyond the global.

Beyond the dynamics of collective and open struggle, a different articulation of care chains and support networks can be found in looking at migrant care workers and their everyday struggle for wellbeing. The following narration is a good example of the intertwining of formal care work and mutual aid, of commoning that works around the borders and limitations of formal integration, trying to soften them in order to gain access to citizenship, public services and rights. It is the account of a Peruvian woman, Martiza, who migrated to Barcelona with her husband and works there as a carer, without papers, She draws on a complex network of support:

I knew a Peruvian girl who helped Maria [Maria is the woman Martiza is

¹¹ Hansen, B. and Numan, M. (2013) *The land is equal: Interview with Muhammed Numan*. Published in *Transversal Webjournal 03/2013*. This interview was done by Bue Hansen for the Sounds of Movement radio show on 'On other family politics'.

¹² The Vienna Refugee Protest is not a most promising example of transversality, due to often being structured and represented as a migrant self-organisation within which 'supporters' play a mere instrumental role (by supporters rather than refugee-migrants ironically, along the lines of a specifically Germanic politics of guilt often expressing itself as 'critical whiteness'), yet I still consider this aspect relevant here.

looking after], and thanks to her I could start to work myself: it was a girl who had been in contact with other compatriots and they indicated to me that I could ask for food and clothes at the Red Cross, also there's a centre in the neighbourhood, and that worked very well for me, especially in the beginning [...]. The neighbours behaved very well, in the shops they already know me and my husband too, of course, since Maria can't leave the house it is always me that shops [...]. Thanks to god and also to that family [that of Maria] that has helped us so much I could bring my husband; it is as though they were my own family, I've always taken their advice; also her mother was very nice with me [...] they are helping me now so I can bring my kids over.¹³

Here, the intertwining of different (more or less traditional) families is complemented by drawing on networks and institutions, as conditioned by Martiza's exclusion from citizenship and capital. She continuously works around limits of access her and lack of rights, finding alternate ways of getting by and doing projects, while also hoping to get her daughters citizenship so they can make a more regular life for themselves. Despite a host of social anchors, the biological family is here seen as the main actor and objective.

Unruly subject positions and the politics of care

Speaking about informal economies that escape representation, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos emphasise the mobile commons as a backstage of the everyday:

The mobile commons is not outside of existing relations of production, reproduction and even exploitation. It covers all these economic activities and services that cannot not be easily accessed through the public sector or privately: how to find (and let alone pay) a doctor or a lawyer; how to find short-term work or more permanent working arrangements, send and receive money, communicate with friends, family and fellow travellers, make it through the economies of smuggling, get the necessary papers for your move, pay for your rent and find the right person 'to talk to'. [...] The last and probably most crucial dimension of the mobile commons is the politics of care, care as the general dimension of caring for the other as well as immediate relations of care and

¹³ Torreadella, L.; Tejero, E. and Lemkow, L. (2001): *Mujeres y la lucha cotidiana por el bienestar*. p.109. My translation from Spanish.

support: mutual cooperation, friendships, favours that you never return, affective support, trust, care for other people's relatives and children, transnational relations of care, the gift economy between mobile people, etc.¹⁴.

The dynamics of migration not only transform traditional models of family and militancy but also mark new forms and approaches to work. The concept of the mobile commons very much resonates with the concept of care networks I am developing here: it describes those spaces across which (within and across borders) precarious lives play out in the everyday, come to be sustained and meaningful beyond an ethics of work. At the edges of neoliberal subjectivity and life-worlds, precarity as much as migration are marked by an ethics of commoning and the transformation of hardships into artful and dignified forms of life. It is not necessarily the misery of the working poor that is at stake here but intense cycles of exclusion and inclusion that mark periods of great insecurity and relative stability. Those often transit through work or jobs, being more of a matter of access and tactical handling (negotiating good terms and relative freedom) rather than a source of pride or ethics.

Migration and subjectivities of work

As such, migration as much as precarity shifts the role of work. Tsianos, Papadopoulos and Stephenson point to their accounts of interviews with transnational migrants near detention centres, where narratives of 'work' do not correspond to those of good liberal subjects:

Many of the transmigrants we talked to [...] used the phrase 'I work only for papers'. Initially we struggled to understand this phrase: On the one hand, we know that a lot of them work in the worst possible conditions, without being documented and only for money. On the other hand, 'papers' [...] is not something which 'you work for', rather we think of 'papers' as something which one is legally entitled to (or not). But these transmigrants challenged two of the widespread assumptions of what a migrant is: firstly, the assumption that migrants are labourers where their subjectivity is defined by their capacity to offer their labour power in 'foreign' labour markets. Secondly, the very distinction between legality and illegality by questioning the dualism between those who are legal subjects of citizenship (if they have 'papers') and those who

¹⁴ Papadopoulos, D. & Tsianos, V. (2013). *After citizenship*. pp.191-192.

are illegal subjects outside of citizenship (if they do not have ‘papers’).[...] This is a double blasphemy against the logic of labour as well as the logic of citizenship.¹⁵

The subjectivity of such hyperprecarious transnational migration is quite the opposite to that of mobile transnational careers. In relation to neoliberal subjectivation, the politics of transnational labour migration and mobile transnational work may be said to differ thus, as well as the function of networks therein. In subaltern migration, the social plays the role of an end, to build support and conviviality, where in contexts of international careers (as unspectacular and precarious as those may be), the social is largely a means to more capital (cultural and financial). Networks too differ based on this distinction, as neoliberal platforms centered around work and personal development or as platforms for the practical organisation of life, passing through jobs but not focussed on it. Of course distinctions are never as clear-cut, but as a general tendency it appears useful to analyse the role of the social, of work and status within networks of transnational movements. What ‘mobilisation’ means in relation to these kinds of subjectivities and networks also differs, in that the collective politics aiming primarily at sociality passes through everyday contexts as much as struggles for access, whilst a politics traversed by (and seeking to reach beyond) neoliberal subjectivity tends to start from work and projects rather than simply everyday relations. Akin to invisible women’s struggles, migrant’s everyday politics somewhat escape representation, for better and worse:

The forms of political action that migrants engage cannot be confused with a mobilisation that resembles the action of a collective historical or political subject. The very conditions of current migration defy the possibility of constructing a viable intentional and permanent subjectivity. It also defies the whole subject-form, whether this is related to the liberal governmental subject or the radical subject of social change¹⁶.

As with precarity, the question of a class *in* itself versus a class *for* itself is echoed in this discussion of collective historical subjects and identities, as is the affirmation of a politics of everyday processes of affirmation, resistance and dodging. The point can hardly be to argue for one in favour of the other, but to integrate different modes of

¹⁵ Ibid. pp186-187.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.187.

valorizing invisible/everyday and visible/'organised' politics: changing laws and institutions is as important as creating non-competitive and non-hierarchical spaces of conviviality. The challenge lies in finding intelligent articulations of these two levels.

Another way of putting it is to speak of ways of articulating antagonism with construction, or destitution (abandoning representative democracy) with constitution¹⁷, or institutions with everyday practice, or a politics of 'the commons' with a politics of 'commoning'. Indeed these pairs mutually enable one another, and it is struggle on both these fronts that comes to be most dangerous to power (to state and market in turn, for instance). As one book on the Commons puts it:

To those engaged in making them, commons guarantee a certain degree of independence from the ruling system because they can thus provide for themselves. This is why commons can undermine relations of domination, enable resistance, protest and rebellion and be the starting point for social change¹⁸.

In speaking of militant care networks, it is precisely these mutually strengthening relations between commoning and resistance that are at stake.

Configurations of transnational relations: technology and presence

Another key area of a micropolitics of networks – one shared across contexts of precarity as well as privilege – concerns the use of technological dispositifs for configuring relations and establishing ways of belonging and care. Care networks and chains imply much trans-local communication and sharing, giving virtual consistency to relations otherwise too distant and dispersed to hold together. Across different kinds of transnational networks, people develop unique modes of using and adapting technologies, softwares and platforms according to their needs and desires. The organisation of survival across distances and passes through bank transfers¹⁹, emails,

¹⁷ See for instance Negri, A. and Hardt, M. (2012) Declaration.

¹⁸ Kratzwald, Brigitte and Exner, Andreas (2012) Commons und Solidarische Oekonomie. p.45. My translation from German.

¹⁹ Remittances for subsistence most often pass through ethnic or specialist money transfer organizations, which in themselves are networks of friendship, solidarity, shared practice and also exploitation. The

phone calls, Skype calls, Facebook, sms, twitter, etc. They warp space and time to make room for caring ways of relating, for people to speak to each other and share resources.

In translocal care networks, differing time zones have their physical and affective consequences on relationships and life rhythms. Anja, an academic and activist in her 30s, remembers of her recent movements between Australia and Europe,

[...] I could speak to someone in the morning and it was their evening, so we had a very different rhythm obviously. There were all these little things where we never thought about how they affect our capacity to relate to each other, how they affected our capacity to listen to each other and speak to each other. [...] I think one of the biggest things that affected what you call care networks was technology and exhaustion. Maybe even putting these things together, an exhaustion by technology, a technoexhaustion, in a sense. [...] I guess that also created another kind of intimacy – I'm not criticizing how that was for other people, but for me that was very difficult, it was really really difficult, and it affected very much my capacity to be in these care networks, because I was often too tired to write emails. And when it came to pleasurable things, I detested the computer so much – when it came to sit down and talk to someone, because I resented the technology, because I was so exhausted by the technology, or the way I related to it...²⁰

Information and communications technologies are key tools for the organization of contemporary work as well as care-reproduction. Their configurations and uses are specific and depend not just on skill but also on availability and configuration of time, and on availability and compatibility of technology. What if one's family back home doesn't have Skype, what if the connection keeps breaking, or if a money transfer is delayed? Similar to the technologies of housework, those used in the margins of the capital-E 'Economy' (as the domains of work and industry, which ignore the minor economies of reproduction and undocumented work) tend to be lagging behind those of

inverse of remittances (money going to migrant's families back home) are money transfers from families themselves to their members in richer nations (often as a kind of startup capital based on the assumption that it will enable the emigrated family member to get an education and/or work that pays relatively well): this directionality concerns the patterns of movement of middle class people along the lines of mobility (which does not imply western middle classes only; at the Vienna Refugee Protest I have met a host of young North African Sans Papiers who regularly received money from their families.)

²⁰ Interview with Anja.

professional and business worlds: there is no investment in reproduction where it yields no profit²¹. The homemaker and her old blender or microwave parallel the precarious migrant worker with her old model of mobile phone, imperfect Skype connections and long-distance phone cards.

Migrants – like, or often as, mothers – become important nodes in fragile networks of survival, with a lot of stress on their capacities of generation, mediation, translation and negotiation. They hold different worlds together, not without strain – psychically, emotionally, physically and materially at once. Relationships, whether of friendship, love or family, have to be held together carefully across geographies, and migration thus comes with a huge task of connecting and sustaining, a struggle to keep alive even the most basic terms of communication and exchange sometimes.

Being there

As Helma Lutz says in a study of transnational mothers, these very much remain faithful, attached and caring towards their families back home – in fact ‘the loyalties and emotional attachments between the members of a transnational family are not weakened by migration.’²² This consideration puts into perspective many stereotypes about how migration necessarily causes dispersion and weakens social ties. Similarly, considering transnational networks as ‘weak’ in terms of their ties perhaps doesn’t get to the bottom of what might better be analysed in terms of bodily alienation, a change in the rhythms and temporalities of relation, and technological mediation. The very physical and intimate dimension of care can never quite be compensated through communications technologies:

Most women try to make up for their physical absence and the danger of losing touch by means of (daily) telephone calls. Today’s affordable cheap providers and phone cards for intercontinental calls abroad facilitate this form of communication, and the telephone becomes the ‘social glue’ for maintaining contact²³.

²¹ For a description of technologies of housework see: Costa, M. D. and S. James (1972). Women and the subversion of the community, by Mariarosa Dalla Costa; and, A woman’s place, by Selma James. Bristol, Falling Wall Press.

²² Lutz, H. (2011). The new maids. p.118

²³ Ibid, p.150

As Lutz's²⁴ fieldwork illustrates, one of the most persistent features of distance is that the very bodily labour of caring often comes to be substituted by a caring 'about' in the sense of a 'Sorge' and of a 'taking care of' in the sense of supportive action. Distant relations of care have this in common: with bodies removed from one another, care can only take the form of preoccupation and of 'taking care of' something (for instance money transfers).

In Joan Tronto's categorization of four levels of care, this would be care as 'disposition': Tronto distinguishes between *caring about* (a disposition), *taking care of* (a gesture and task), *care-giving* (work) and *care-receiving*. Tronto points out the way these different levels are gendered: it is often men who 'take care of' tasks such as bringing along some wine for dinner, fixing the car etc., while it is often women who take on the more continuous and invisible labours of care-giving such as looking after other bodies, cooking, cleaning etc. In the case of migration of mothers, a displacement of this traditional division takes place, with migrant mother's care expressing itself through the sending of money or organising of gifts, and those staying behind taking on the physical labour of care. Someone else, often other women, looks after the bodies back home as the transnational mother functions as breadwinner.

Migration vs. mobility: the perspective of governance

To grasp transnational care networks of different kinds, one needs to take into account matters of class and race, regimes and policies of migration, and the vocabularies of skill that underpin them. The difference between what we understand to be a knowledge worker and a subaltern worker, or between who we call an 'immigrant', 'migrant' or 'mobile' subject is not least shaped by policy that regulates movement via access to citizenship and the labour market. Immigration and industrial policy are ever more intimately interconnected with globalization – the expansion of imperial politics – since outsourcing, wage dumping and relocating depend on the availability and mobility of labour locally and internationally.

I speak of migration as displacement from one's home as well as local social and support network, whether internally to a country or beyond national borders, here. It is

²⁴ Ibid, p.150

useful to point out the class character of different forms of migration: not only by way of distinguishing ‘economic migrants’ from ‘refugees’ (a distinction often used by states to deport those who do not seem to be risking their lives immediately if returning to their countries of origin) but also by distinguishing between different forms of ‘economic’ migration: the displacements of the subaltern hardly resemble the pathways of mobility of professional classes. While migration always entails an uprooting and practices of network building, migrants’ class and origin determine their rights as well as ways of travelling, settling, networking and working. For the subaltern, primary support and social networks are built through the family, friends and friends of friends (not least due to being based in informal economies)²⁵; for precarious workers those networks are often a mix of family-friends, acquaintances (from studying for instance) and more or less formal professional networks²⁶; while high-mobility professionals strongly draw support from employers (who pay for moving, housing and provide insurances and bonuses) and professional networks.

I am primarily concerned with the overlaps between subaltern and precarious forms of displacement and support here. As Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra affirm in their comparative study of the affective labour of care workers and bankers, ‘Analyzing the labour, organisational and affective aspects of different kinds of work and migration can be useful for undermining stereotypes and tracing connections previously unseen.’²⁷ My approach also differs from theirs, because I am not comparing very high-mobility and career-based migration with very low-status and low-income migration: between the precarious and subaltern modalities of displacement and support, there is not only qualitative similarity but also potential common ground for organising.

As regards migration, two technologies of governance are key in sorting exploitable and cheap migrant labour from more appreciated, visible migrant workers: metric immigration systems on the one hand, and the notions and measurements of ‘skill’ that underpin them on the other. The two are inextricably linked, with one serving to legitimise the other in arguments that are often based in abstract, false or unspoken

²⁵ Studies of migrant care chains/work, remittance transfers and bordercrossing show this. Datta, K. (2011). *New migrant communities and financial services : keeping themselves to themselves?* Dorking, Friends Provident Foundation.

²⁶ That is, if we define precarity as that condition which feeds on temporary and insecure employment without however being entirely informal, as existing between the space of the dead-end and invisible job and the career path.

²⁷ Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2007), *Border as Method*.

judgements of what a nation's economy 'needs' – as the global north body-shops for Indian IT workers, Care workers from Malaysia, Polish plumbers, etc.²⁸. Beyond demand for particular supply however, it is clear that exploitable migrant labour is needed to sustain capitalist economies. As such, state policy continuously negotiates and reinforces anti-migration, racist and colonialist discourses and practices, with institutions and organisations mediating.

Work, immigration law and vocabularies of skill: a UK example

In the UK, the Points Based System for Immigration (PBSI)²⁹ determines who can or can't enter the country to work. It was introduced in 2008 as a management system for migration and labour flows, under the auspices of more 'efficient' regulation. It is part of a vast, largely privatized system of immigration control³⁰, the configuration and rules of which change³¹ every few months, making migrants vulnerable in their status and thus rights to work and dwell. It is a policy framework that adapts to global markets and politics, a key characteristic of neoliberal policy more broadly: acting upon populations as objects (disregarding the real subjects, experiences and lives that policy impacts on) and proceeds by a trial and error manner that flexibly adapts to changes in markets (of labour, finance, etc.)³². In the neoliberal context, we may speak of short-term experiments upon the field of the social via an economic mindset. The PBSI institutes such ever-changing economics-based management of human bodies and lives, differentiating between them according to the conjuncture.

The PBSI sorts migrants by tiers that are arranged according to a sliding scale of skill, capital and provenance. People with money, education and first world passports may enter, while those with less money and skill can only move if deemed 'desirable' or needed for a specific job. The classism, racism and sexism that come with this are blatant. In 2011, Tier 1 visas are for 'Migrants with desirable professional skills' (which notably includes 'highly skilled workers, investors and entrepreneurs, and includes a

²⁸ See UKBA (2011) 'First annual limit on non-EU workers comes into force to reduce immigration into the UK', UKBA website.

²⁹ See UKBA (2011) 'Working in the UK', UKBA website.

³⁰ Many of the agencies managing Visa applications (VFS Global primarily) and running detention centres (G4S, Serco, and other companies) in conjunction with the UKBA and HM Prison services are private enterprises.

³¹ For a study of policy shifts in relation to student visa regimes, see the blog of the CounterMapping QMary project/campaign.

³² For an investigation of neoliberal policies of social services, see also Avila, D. and Molina, M, (2008), *Manos Invisibles*.

fussy category called ‘exceptional talent’); Tier 2 for ‘Skilled workers with an offer of employment’ (people with diplomas and degrees, sponsors/job offers); Tier 3 for ‘Temporary, low skilled workers’ (including ‘creative and sporting’ people of the Creative Industries); Tier 4 for ‘Students’; Tier 5 for ‘Youth mobility schemes/temporary workers’.³³

How do creative and care labour fit within this system, as of the early years of the 2010s? Creative workers may fall into Tier 1, if highly educated, successful and/or ‘exceptionally talented’³⁴. Or they may enter in the ‘temporary work’ Tier 3, to stay in the UK for a maximum of 12 months, if they have a job offer, money and enough credentials as creatives. Care workers, on the contrary, are not specifically interpellated via the Tier system. Those with diplomas could come in under the ‘skilled’ Tier 2, if they have a job offer/sponsor and budget, while those without such qualifications can only possibly enter as domestic workers – to work in a private UK household one needs to already be an ‘established member of an employer’s staff’ overseas. The domestic worker category allows overseas employers to bring their domestic workers with them when they visit or move to the United Kingdom. Paid domestic work doesn’t enter under Tiers 1-5 but sits in the ‘other’ category.³⁵

Hierarchies of skill and visibility ensure that some are privileged over others in this system, which institutes racism, sexism and classism in a technical language. It is clear that creative workers, given their generally higher level of recognized ‘skills’ as education, have more mobility than care workers, as a labour force: many so-called ‘unskilled’ care workers only have the option of crossing borders without papers. What is recognized as ‘skill’ in care work is very limited: as one paper³⁶ argues, the aspects of evaluating, awareness raising, communicating, managing conflict, coordinating, monitoring, comforting and problem solving are not valorized in caring professions. Bodily care too is considered unskilled unless of a medical sort. Where in other sectors, job descriptions may include body care qualifications, ironically in care work the assumption is often that it is ‘unskilled’ – and thus remains underpaid.

³³ UKBA website (April 2011), ‘Working in the UK’.

³⁴ For Tier 1, which is where people of privilege are clustered together, one does not require a job offer/sponsor. Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Junor, A.; Hampson, I. and Ogle, K. R. (2009): *Vocabularies of Skill: The Case of Care and Support Workers*, in: *Work Matters, Critical Reflections on Contemporary Work*, Edited by Bolton, Sharon C. and Houlihan, Maeve. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

While there is a contentious aspect to arguing in favour of more specialized measure of affective, communicative and organisational skill – since those would inevitably fall prey to the regimes of profit extraction and alienation – it appears important to question the vocabularies of skill at play in the protocols that lead to the sorting of people into first to second and third class residents or subjects (denizens).

As Guy Standing points out³⁷, in a flexible economy based mostly around services, where paid work, unpaid work and reproductive work all integrate to constitute an on-going enslavement of the precariat, one cannot only count one set of practices as skills (those to do with paid work). Indeed reproductive work always requires skills, and so does the growing unpaid work that today is required for accessing jobs: writing CVs, networking, doing finances, managing oneself, self-representation, fitting into ever changing policy categories, etc. Standing further points to what may be understood as skills proper for survival and work in a flexible economy:

Indeed, schooling may act to block the development of skills needed to survive in a precarious economic system. To be ‘streetwise’ is a skill as is the capacity to network, the ability to earn trust and build up favours, and so on. These are precariat skills. The skills required in a tertiary society also include the ability to limit self-exploitation to an optimal and sustainable level.³⁸

We may draw some parallels between the ‘streetwise’ skills of the precariat and the ‘malandragem’³⁹ wisdoms of subaltern subjects and vulnerable migrants: in either case, the politically important move seems to be to build cultures of precedents around them without subjecting them to measure.

Mobile, networked commons: cultures of precedents?

³⁷ Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat*. p.121-124

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.122

³⁹ In Brazilian, ‘Malandragem is defined as an aggregation of strategies utilized in order to gain advantage in a determined situation (these advantages are often illicit). It is characterized by savoir faire and subtlety. [...] despite this apparently egocentric, lying and malicious nature, the person who uses the *malandragem* is not necessarily selfish. While probably lazy, he is not careless with the people around him. The person that uses *malandragem* to take advantage of another person, normally does not do it intending to harm others, but rather only to find their way out of an unjust situation even if this means sometimes resorting to illegal methods’. Wikipedia (2013) Entry on ‘Malandragem’.

There is a wealth of knowledges and practices of mobility and precarity that we may refer to in trying to build a ‘culture of precedents’ around the mobile and precarious commons. David Vercauteren, in his book on the micropolitics of groups, speaks of the importance of the ways in which collective memory shapes practice in social movements. He proposes that collaboration and commoning can constitute cultures that are transmissible across experiences and generations, in asking:

[...] what can have happened so that in our collectivities, the knowledges that could have constituted a culture of precedents are so minimally present? Our [hi]story [histoire] thus takes us to an indeterminate perspective: what could happen if we nevertheless paid some attention to these knowledges that lead towards the successes, inventions and defeats of groups? What if the ancestor or the one who calls to memory were to come into existence!?⁴⁰

While the family is an institution that strongly transmits memory – even and sometimes particularly in cases of migration – the network is an associational form that does so rather less. The network, because of its informality and flexibility, in fact often seems to be an associational form without memory – a space of passage rather than dwelling, wherein the productivity of language and information tends to concern the short term. My proposal here, particularly through my interviews, is to encourage storytelling and collective reflection within networks, towards the shaping of cultures of precedents and a way of mapping the network as durable space of the common. I follow Starhawk⁴¹ in her affirmations of the need for shared narrations and concepts to understand collective constitution and process: not to build major or majoritarian cultures, but to provide threads and points of orientation for strengthening situated struggles. To account for precedents often passes through a mapping of present practices, to make a kind of inventory of dynamics, roles and practices that hold spaces of life and militancy together: not the arrogant or ignorant affirmation of a subculture but rather a critical and careful reflection on how things work.

In speaking of the cultures that the movement of the 15M built via its initial camps,

⁴⁰ Vercauteren, D. (2007) *Micropolitique des groupes: pour une écologie des pratiques collectives*, Fourcalquier: Editions HB. p.7

⁴¹ See for instance: Starhawk (2011) *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Marga reflects on the relation between professional knowledges and the articulation of new organisational practices that emerged in the camps. She emphasises the involvement of pre-existing individual skills in the emergence of the 15M camps:

(...) all *that* was mounted within a moment. That's to say, the knowledges that everyone brought, and which generally came from the exercise of their profession or from the activity that a person recognized as what they're about – a nurse did nursing, a group facilitator facilitated group work, a photographer took pictures, and so on – with all that, we saw all that we knew, all that we were capable of taking apart. There was a surplus of knowledge. We were rich in ways of knowing how to do things. Where did we learn all that? Well, maybe in experiments whose value we didn't see at the time – one of those was Tabacalera [an occupied social centre in Madrid], but there are thousands – in hiking groups, in groups of friends [amigas], in people meeting, in people who simply talk via Facebook, but that have learned to speak the language of friendship, of respecting each other – in millions of small seeds⁴².

The interplay between individual knowledges and the slow articulation of common practices and notions is key to collective ecologies and cultures. Where no resonance between individual and professional practices and the collective elaboration of formats, concepts, discourses, memes, networks and institutions is given, organisational processes become unsustainable. Even if their ultimate aim is to undo professional knowledges, it is clear that the feedback between individual and collective needs to be given in order for a process of individuation to function on both levels.

The experience of a continuity of individual and collective dimensions also enables the production of cultural artefacts as 'singular commons'. The family is one site of such production of continuity and memory, but workplaces and everyday collective relations too increasingly dwell on shared productions and documentations. Another series of symptoms of the merging of life and work concerns collective production and self-referentiality: the photo album is now a technology shared beyond the family, while management techniques are increasingly applied to intimate and family life. Friendship and co-work develop spaces of shared memory, particularly in the latter case heavily

⁴² Interview with Marga.

invested by employers to whom the generation of the experience of community becomes a key tool for controlling workers. The fact that ‘friendship’ becomes a word conflating both intimate and highly superficial relations, mixing face to face relations with distant acquaintances, adds to a diffuse sense of an abstract friendliness of the world: having several hundred Facebook friends may act as a purveyor of trust and assurance in a context of dispersed social relations and long-term loneliness.

Experience itself is a term to be questioned here, if by this word we mean more than mere sensory presence in the face of events, but rather a lived process capable of modifying subjectivity and touching the core of one’s relation to power. In Spanish, ‘experimentar’ means at the same time to try out, to feel and to experience: hence the importance of this term in grounding contemporary political practices sensitive to processes of subjectivity and collectivity. Experience here is more than the individual being touched by an event, but a matter of shared sensitivities to processes and potentials. To posit experience in relation to continuity and collectivity is to address the Benjaminian poverty of experience in relation to the indebted subject and opportunistic, speculative individualism. Collective experience may become a tool against the power that individualizes and regulates, no longer subject to authority but to a shared self-care that opens for new ways of listening and relating.

Continuous experiences, existential circuits, futurity

The question of possible cultures of care concerns the possibilities of inventing new ways of relating to the long term, in having shared memory on the one hand but also in having a future to share. Maurizio Lazzarato points out that in the context of a debt economy – where social rights are transformed into debt – capitalism captures not only labour time but also the time of decision and contemplation, taking hold of our sense of futurity and our ability to make life choices. Debt repayment structures futurity in an individualising and guilt-producing way. Hence as well as building on precedents, relating to the future becomes complicated today:

How to act in this world, how to risk oneself in an action with an uncertain outcome, when one doesn’t know of what the future will be made? In order to act in conditions of uncertainties one needs trust (a ‘belief’) in oneself, a trust in the world and a trust in others. One has to make a tacit agreement with oneself, the world and others in order to act in a world where the ‘routinely rules’ won’t

serve to guide action. Action thus constitutes a jumping into the unknown, which ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ can never help us to go through. Our scepticism and our political impasses aren’t cognitive, because ‘we live forwards and we think backwards’ as James says in quoting Kierkegaard. Living forward means ‘to believe in the world and in the new possibilities of life’ that are wrapped up in it, Deleuze adds.⁴³

The link between past and future comes via the present, which today appears fragmented and discontinuous. To experience continually requires a collective confrontation not just with shared precedents and anticipations but also with the modes of dependency and action that precarity and migration produce in the present.

Where the possibilities of constructing long circuits and feedback across past, present and future are blocked, social relations appear to be floating outside of history and society, making it difficult to sustain collective reference points as well as norms as part of long term projects of collective becoming. Bernard Stiegler points out that the establishment of ‘long circuits’ of investment is crucial for the production of desire, since desire hinges on the infinite, not on short temporalities and disposable projects or relations. Not unlike Lazzarato, who shows how debt repayment submits a debtor and their future to evaluation and measure, Stiegler points to the destructive force of measure:

[...] [the] harnessing of libidinal energy leads to its destruction: it submits to calculation that which, as object of desire, is only constituted through becoming infinitized, that is, through surpassing all calculation. This destruction of desire leads to a drive-based ‘frustration’, forming a system with what, in 20th century consumerist society, conditions the social absorption of innovation described by Schumpeter as ‘economic evolution’, leading to the installation of a system tending to produce chronic and structural obsolescence, a system for which the *normal* relation to objects becomes disposability.⁴⁴

With neoliberalism, housing, healthcare and access to education are undone from their status as resources to which everyone has a universal right. The encompassing crisis of

⁴³ Lazzarato, M. (2011). *La fabrique de l’homme endetté*. p.55.

⁴⁴ Stiegler, B. (2010): *For a new critique of Political Economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press. p.83

institutions marks a moment of intensification of dynamics that have long been at play, now becoming particularly life-threatening. If crisis is the moment that decides whether a patient will live or die, then we may ask who the patient is in our current context. While the capitalist system faces a moment of reconfiguration and challenges (concerning its legitimacy and modes of accumulation), it seems clear that the patient at stake is the people. And it is also clear that so-called rescue plans and austerity packages do not counteract but further tendencies of capitalist destruction: unless there is broad contestation and resistance, those plans will have their desired effect of accumulation and selective exclusion. An absence of means for survival as well as a debilitating loss of continuity makes itself felt in northern and central European countries too now, albeit different from what the old colonies, the debt-enslaved countries at the margins of the EU or in the deepest outskirts of cities suffer.

Recognising and valuing the mobile commons appears to be one answer to the challenge of building both memory and futurity in these days of precarization and impoverishment. In order to get at the ways in which brutal social exclusion and more gentle precarization interact in this moment of crisis, I will now proceed to explore some perspectives on governance in the following section. The role of care and new communitarianisms appears important here, tracing not just new ways of understanding the way neoliberalism captures collective energies but also possible ways of building collective practice and experience in the face of the violence that the crisis increasingly implies.

This chapter, as well as section B generally, has pointed to some overlaps across migrant labour, familial arrangements and precarity are transforming within contexts of global networks and neoliberal economics. This section on organisation has thus mapped out how global networks shape practices of work, organisation and relation. Those dynamics are characteristic of the way of governing social and economic conduct known as 'neoliberal' – which we will now move on to define and analyse – is always contested from within and beyond, and subverted towards making new commons possible.

But the logic of surplus production in turn again subverts those dynamics too, as capitalists and entrepreneurs look for new ways of making profits. In the neoliberal

moment, this tendency has been thoroughly incorporated into the sphere of government via the blending of the capitalist logic with that of the government of populations. In the section that follows, we will look at innovations and attempts at capture arising from within the dominant neoliberal paradigm, such as those of free labour and new communitarian tendencies. These appear in a moment where neoliberal accumulation enters into crisis and the state needs to redefine its strategies of social reproduction and facilitation of surplus production. The point of view here, while focussing on macropolitical tendencies, remains one focussed on resistance and struggle, and the innovations and continuities pertaining to it.

**SECTION C: GOVERNANCE,
REPRODUCTION, COMMONS**

Introduction to section on governance, reproduction and commons

This final section leads towards a set of questions that appear crucial in the context of the current social, reproductive and economic crisis, and attempts to signpost some key conflicts and dynamics around reproduction and care in this context. The tension between governance and commoning comes to be addressed here in relation to the current crisis of social reproduction, both from the viewpoint of policy and from social movement practices.

In relation to both economic policy and practices of autonomy, institutions are important objects and sites of contestation and struggle: this is due to the crisis of representation and distribution that is currently causing people to take to the streets in great numbers and affirm a politics of the 99%, refusing to be represented by political elites, as well as being due to the new forms of social and economic misery introduced by the marcopolitical regimes of debt and austerity in Europe, making the shaping of new organisations of social reproduction as well as struggle for the existing ones necessary.

The relation of autonomy to heteronomy comes to be increasingly at stake in this context, and social movements increasingly emphasize the dimension of reproduction in their struggles. Particularly feminist currents within them are sites where a new politics of autonomy in relation to interdependency and vulnerability are developed.

This section also investigates new strategies for social reproduction as emerging on the level of macropolitics and governance: economic crisis seems to prepare the terrain for neo-liberal and -communitarian programmes in some places (I focus on the UK and Argentina here), wherein state responsibility is redefined as a matter of supervision rather than distribution. In proposals such as that of the Big Society in the UK, a new instrumentalization of free labour and politics of charity and self-care emerge, making it

urgent for practices of resistance to articulate a fresh stance both in relation to reproduction and waged work. This opens possibilities for affirming new relations between the two, and in this sense might be seen to point back to section A as well as opening onto future reflections about the role of care, the commons and institutions in a desirable democratic future.

Chapter C.1 re-introduces the problematic of free labour as concerning post-Fordist and reproductive work, this time with specific regard to governance and policy. I dwell here on the role of internships and volunteering in neoliberal economies undergoing a new cycle of primitive accumulation that captures the vital and cooperative time of individuals. Relating to this, I give some consideration to how work is spoken about in contexts of neoliberal policy, particularly in looking at an OECD report on cooking, caring and volunteering. On the one hand, I dwell on the role of care as mechanism of pastoral and neo-communitarian power here, pointing to some ways in which those come to be embodied in the crisis context. On the other hand, I draw out some ways in which care is collectively appropriated by social movements in the same context, in pointing to experiments with autonomous reproduction and institutionality as well as to a micropolitics of care and trust.

In drawing on policy examples from contemporary UK (The Big Society) and Argentina (Argentina Trabaja), the question of relations between forms of social movement and manufactured community is a central theme here. Care plays a Janus-faced role in the context of contemporary articulations of neoliberal entrepreneurship with new instrumentalisation of collectivity and association: this chapter tries to tackle some articulations of passion and compassion in the current European crisis context, as reflecting the ways in which neoliberalism puts creativity and care to work.

Chapter C.2 concludes the reflections of this thesis in further following up on questions around commons and precarity. It sets out to take a closer look at definitions of autonomy and heteronomy as articulated by social movements sensitive to the questions of feminism and institutions. Precarity, networks and the problem of continuous experience and practice are contextualised in relation to the European moment of multiple crises here, pointing to some of the open questions and challenges facing social movements in this moment.

C.1 Neoliberal governance, communitarianism and free labour

How was it possible to ensure the development of practices of preservation and formation of the population while at the same time detaching it from any directly political role and yet applying to it a mission of donation, pacification, and social integration? The answer: By means of philanthropy. Philanthropy in this case is not be understood as a naively apolitical term signifying a private intervention in the sphere of so-called social problems, but must be considered as a deliberately depoliticizing strategy for establishing public services and facilities at a sensitive point midway between private initiative and the state.¹

Defining neoliberal governance

The need for rethinking power and governance is great in the context of global crisis, where it becomes clear that existing state-based institutions and the neoliberal policies that most governments administer can not adequately address the growing impasses in ecology, reproduction and the social, but indeed are at the root of crisis. The neoliberal social is characterized by a proliferation of distinctions through which policy administrators select parts of populations, while at the same time making the boundaries between those distinctions flexible and subject to ‘merit’, allowing subjects to shift in and out of certain statuses (having employment, residence permits, debt, etc.). Power operates by way of divisions as well as processes of merging: it differentiates to divide and rule, yet with advanced capitalism it increasingly also conflates, in order to extract surplus value from sociability and cooperation.

Rather than relying on an invisible hand governing and safeguarding the market sphere, neoliberalism operates an invisibilisation of select labouring hands, not just of women

¹ Donzelot, J. (1979). The policing of families. p.55

and migrants but increasingly also of free labourers within the economy. In a text called ‘invisible hands’, Deborah Avila and Marta Malo point out that neoliberal power is not about non-intervention:

To be sure, neoliberalism reduces the intervention of public powers *in* the market to a minimum. But that doesn’t mean that public powers don’t intervene: indeed they do – they intervene in the social with an ensemble of precise operations, in order to organize it *for* the market, in order to make the social be productive and functional in terms of economic productivity, encouraging competition.²

As mentioned earlier, neoliberal power is about precise policies of division and regulation that make power more diffuse and self-managing. Perhaps this is a first feature of neoliberalism, as a biopolitical technology of government. Its second feature comes to be particularly manifest after the millennium, with the onset of service economies largely based in digital, distributed modes of organisation. In this second moment, cooperation comes to be particularly emphasized, as do community, togetherness and other synonyms for collectivity. A new neoliberal ideology develops which naturalizes the social while meticulously influencing and controlling it:

Neoliberal techniques of government, rather than setting themselves the objective of transforming reality in order to achieve its adequation to a social norm or model, situate themselves in the interior of reality itself, taking on all its complexity and letting ‘things happen’ as if it were a matter of natural phenomena. From this perspective, a population is no longer a conjunct of subjects but a technico-political object of government that tends to self-regulate.³

The Big Society of David Cameron’s Conservatives is an exemplary model of this logic, emphasizing self-organisation and community empowerment while proposing a subtle regime of shaping and containing such activity. It is but one of the more blatant examples of policy discourse that exposes public institutions to the interventions of markets whilst keeping a good grip on the way those institutions are run by people. As

² Avila, D. and Molina, M. (2008), *Manos Invisibles*.

³ Ibid.

Maurizio Lazzarato reminds us: ‘In order to “let things happen” (laissez faire), one has to intervene a lot’⁴. Where neoliberalism divides and endlessly differentiates, it increasingly also associates, calling into being ‘communities’ and ‘networks’ at will. Performative techniques of interpellation are used to produce relation, by a form of governance which increasingly creates and molds collective subjects that can take on former roles of public service provision. In the case of the Big Society, these may be schools or clinics ‘run’ by parents and patients, at full market exposure and subject to state regulation, but there are plenty of other examples of how such interpellation is used to extract value. Management practices around teamwork, as much as calls for collectively ‘tightening the belt’, are part of this technique of conflation-association that seeks to render a given social body productive. The individualising tendencies of (neo-)liberalism are here complemented by (neo-)communitarianist technologies for assembling and managing the social.

Production and reproduction seem to blur in this context: work and life seem to become the same, as do friends and bosses. Yet they have to be kept separate in the last instance, since this separation is what allows capital to exploit the paid labour of some as well as the free labour of others. The wage still functions to create a hierarchy between those whose work is recognized and remunerated, and those who depend on them: work is still waged work and bosses are still those who wield power over ones remuneration for work. Never mind the blurring of ‘work’ and ‘life’ – the divisions between those who steadily earn money and those who don’t remains intact at this stage of capitalism, indeed crucial to it. What determines an activity’s place in either one or the other sphere is its situation in relation to the market, pay and rights: reproductive work will always be the work that enables the formal economy via labours that are not recognised by this very economy, and thus come without visibility, pay and rights.

Production and reproduction are only relative as long as they generate free labour and their blurring produces the impression that people can ‘no longer differentiate between work they did for themselves and that which they did for the landlords’ – as Federici says of the impact of money economies on peasant subsistence and work.⁵ In the late neoliberal paradigm, this confusion between work done for oneself and work done for ones employers reaches another level (marking another cycle of primitive

⁴ Lazzarato, M. (2009) *Experimentations Politiques*, p.16

⁵ Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and the Witch*, p.29

accumulation): every gesture, every movement, thought and relationship may become 'productive'. Associational forms such as networks but also organizational forms such as NGOs and voluntary organisations imply a reorganization in the way neoliberalism renders the social productive (inserting old politics of charity and the colony in frameworks of flexible management). 'Work' has an uncertain status in this context, apparently becoming an activity for its own sake, as the promotion of volunteering and free labour suggest.

Free labour: internships, workfare, volunteering

In neoliberalism, to be able to work for free increasingly becomes a prerequisite for finding any stable service work at all: from hairdressers to bankers, arts administrators to retail officers, most jobs require several months of work experience and all kinds of special qualifications. Neoliberal policy encourages the proliferation of specialisms, via which it regulates access to jobs, and as such it encourages the free labour that comes with becoming-specialist in order to fit employment categories. Aside from this tendency towards the hyper-fragmentation and privatization of knowledge, the reproductive crisis that neoliberalism engenders – and the cuts that come with it – also means that many formerly waged jobs get turned into internships. Cases of legal prosecution of employers who ignore minimum wage legislation by employing interns to do full time work become more frequent in the UK around 2010.⁶

The Carrot Workers Collective (2007 – present) and Precarious Workers Brigade (which emerged from the Carrot Workers Collective in 2010) campaign on unpaid work in the cultural and education sectors, calling on interns to organise and fight against the spreading of free labour. As the Carrot Workers Collective say in a 2009 text on free labour, in the fields of education this comes back to two moments in policy:

Situated in a broader debate around the condition of precarity, the context for our analysis of free labour is around two trends in Europe: 1. The Bologna process proposition to validate and standardise lifelong, lifewide and 'flexible' learning, and 2. The European Union language promoting 'occupation' rather than 'employment', marking a subtle but interesting semantic shift towards

⁶ Malik, S. and Ball, J. (2011) 'Interns work – and should be paid, lawyers warn ministers'. The Guardian, 10th November 2011.

keeping the active population ‘busy’ rather than trying to create jobs. The figure of the intern appears in this context paradigmatic as it negotiates the collapse of the boundaries between Education, Work and Life. Like Tiziana Terranova suggested in her analysis of free labour in digital media, we must conceive of free labour, internships, volunteer work not as a separate sphere of activity but as condition of late capitalist cultural economy. [...] What appears to be a ‘stage’ (like the French word for internship) in the trajectory whose result is to be found in a lifetime paid employment, is a rehearsal for uncertain career paths, hyper-active networking, strategic lunching and infinite flexibility: in other words, an internship in the strategic use of affects, an internship without end.⁷

The education sector plays a vital role in setting young graduates up as free workers in the service industries, and the increasing privatization of this sector goes hand in hand with the shift towards a more precarious organization of work. Cultures of free work have long been commonplace in the arts and cultural sector – where notions of passionate work and cultures of self-development abound – as well as in relation to specific training programmes, in the crafts for instance (where work placements meant a genuine experience of learning and professional integration, often paid and with a perspective of employment associated with it). As Hito Steyerl says,

I’d guess that—apart from domestic and care work—art is the industry with the most unpaid labor around. It sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labour and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.⁸

It is important to note that internships and work placements are increasingly advertised in all kinds of sectors. Far beyond the prestigious realms of art or high-paying jobs, employers now heavily rely on free labour across the board, and unpaid jobs are even intensely competed for.⁹

⁷ Carrot Workers Collective (2007) *On Free Labour*. Blog Post.

⁸ Steyerl, H. (2011), *Contemporary art and the transition to post-democracy*, in: Julieta Aranda et al. (eds.) *E-Flux Journal No.21*, December 2010.

⁹ Coughlan, S. (2009) ‘Intern fees “Salt in the wound”’. BBC News, 25th November 2009.

With workfare policies becoming more widespread in the context of capitalist austerity, people are asked to work for free at supermarket tills, as cleaners or shelving stackers¹⁰ – if they refuse, they will lose their benefits¹¹ (some successful legal appeals are being made here too however¹²). Such ‘work placements’ have nothing to do with placing people in learning experiences in their chosen field of work, but rather randomly allocate free labour to major companies in the UK. New job seekers have to do unpaid placements, while those who have been claiming benefits for over two years will be forced to do community service (a sentence often given for minor crimes)¹³. The ‘Boycott Workfare’ campaign sees this as ‘a clear sign that the government intends to use forced labour to replace the gaps left in public service delivery¹⁴’ - indeed for many unemployed people such free workfare labour comes to be the only way to survive (on the dole), the only other option being criminalized activities for which in turn they may end up serving community sentences or prison terms.

In the ‘third’ or ‘voluntary’ sector, too, free labour abounds¹⁵: the growth¹⁶ of this sector and the intense investment in it by neoliberal policymakers speaks of a general restructuring of waged labour in contemporary capitalism. In the UK, both the New Labour and Conservative Parties are focusing on this sector as a key element to ‘economic growth’: voluntary work and philanthropy are made policy in order to undo the states’ redistributory role as welfare provider. The neoliberal blurring of work and life implies a new regime of com/passionate labour and subjectivity, combining charity with aspiration: creativity and care are at the heart of this transformation, and as such key elements to contest this very regime.

Neo-communitarianisms

¹⁰ BBC News (2011) ‘Graduate “made to stack shelves” seeks judicial review’, BBC News, 5th December 2011.

¹¹ For information of UK workfare policies, see the Boycott Workfare Campaign.

¹² Lyons, James (2013) Tories’ forced work outlawed: Court of Appeal rules “workfare” schemes are illegal. The Mirror, 12th Feb. 2013.

¹³ See Department for Work and Pensions (2001) ‘Grayling: Community Work for the Long Term Unemployed’.

¹⁴ Boycott Workfare (2011) ‘New Community Sentences for Claimants’.

¹⁵ Grunwald, T. (2011) ‘Are charities’ unpaid interns really “volunteers”?’ , The Guardian, 27th June 2011.

¹⁶ Skills-Third Sector Website (2011) The Voluntary Sector Workforce – New Almanac Chronicles a Decade’s Growth.

Care, community and control (UK and Argentina)

What is the connection between this emergent regime of individualization and cooperation, and the current situation of crisis? How may the neoliberal project be carried forth in contexts of economic decline, unemployment and social revolt, where the promise of self-realisation no longer appears credible? How might subjectivity be mobilised towards free labour and aspiration when little financial reward is in sight? While concrete articulations of neoliberalism and crisis politics remain to be witnessed, one key to them lies in the aspect of austerity and the activation of community for sustaining populations along the breadline: the incorporation of charity within popular collective practice is proposed in models such as the 'Big Society' of David Cameron's Conservatives. This model proposes the formation of self-reliant collectivities that can take over previous welfare state services, while being entirely enmeshed in a market economy and policed by the state. Dwelling on the spirit of community and mutual aid, it is a strategic ideological proposal in the context of austerity measures that bail out banks while dissolving existing mutualist structures.

Based in a rhetoric of autonomy from state dependency, as well as of care and 'pulling together', the 'Big Society' version of mutualism taps into growing cultures of unpaid work and of volunteering, institutionalising unpaid work as 'progressive' and 'independent' from state support and even from wages ('free' labour here comes to be the charitable labour of *vogelfrei* [free of means of re/production] and wealthy citizens), while aiming to create social cohesion in times of impoverishment and repression. As the de facto politics of the UK Conservatives consists in disintegrating public institutions, its proposal of new kinds of 'independent' institutions is only genuine to the extent that it wants to tap into self-managed initiatives and make them depend on the market (needing to generate profits) and accountable to the state (for licences, funding, etc.) in ways more subtle than those of the welfare state. A new biopolitics that instrumentalizes the collective beyond mere post-Fordist, networked and passionate cooperation, proposing a new ideology of compassion and 'we are all in this together' (as Cameron insists) community.

While this ideological proposal is sometimes framed as a moment of demise of a certain neo-liberal model that necessitates new forms of governance, I would rather see it as a point of continuity and development. Michael Sandel, a public academic allegedly

beyond right and left, fan of Aristotle's 'good life' and a supporter of the Big Society – who happens to be a favourite of the ruling elites across the Anglo-Saxon world – argues:

We've had three decades of market triumphalism. [...] And that basic assumption of the Reagan/Thatcher years was not challenged during the 1990s or the early 2000s, in Britain or America. And then we had the financial crisis, and I think the crisis marked the end of those three decades. So now the question is: what governing philosophy will take its place? And this is up for grabs. But no party has worked it out yet.¹⁷

The appeal of neo-communitarian rhetorics of 'the common good' is that it absorbs discourses from left and right, drawing on Tea Party as well as on Green movements, in producing a powerful populist unity of discourse. Beyond words, it is of course concrete policy and government that show what is meant and intended with such proposals, and to be sure those won't diverge too much from the general politics of the parties proposing them – like the UK Conservatives or indeed the Argentinian Partido Justicialista under Christina Kirchner, which combines socialism, cooperativism and neoliberal reform in a populist mashup not unlike that of the Big Society.

The programme 'Argentina Trabaja' is interesting, strangely resonating albeit also contrasting example to the Big Society and its likes in Europe – drawn up by the Peronist government of Christina Kirchner, which similarly draws on the cooperative form for the organisation of society into productive yet also somewhat self-sustaining units that run on collective entrepreneurship and capitalizes on the networks and social cooperation of movements. More than the Big Society still, this proposal is ambivalent since it draws on social movements and is declaredly leftwing, steeped in the Peronist tradition. Speaking to people from the Centro de Salud Comunitaria of the MTD in Florencio Varela and San Francisco Solano, Buenos Aires, about their relation to these government programmes, the rejection is strong:

Zulma: This space didn't get any money, you see? We got...

Neca: We were paid for work done in workers cooperatives.

¹⁷ Grant, O. (2011) 'How Cameron's Big Society could have an unlikely saviour: Aristotle', The Telegraph, 21st January 2011.

Z.: ...independently.

Maba: But in any case, the programme that the government launched is called 'Argentina Trabaja' [Argentina at Work] and it was to that popular organisations or unemployed people could form workers cooperatives. Since we already had a history of struggle and of winning self-management and self-control over all [government support] programmes, of subsidies that the government offered, we could sustain our form of work...or continue to do what we'd been doing for a long time. Because other people who formed cooperatives always had to depend on what the municipalities or the government said, or the political party that they were part of. [...] We always fought, obviously, to be able to use these resources offered by the government but whilst maintaining our autonomy and self-managing everything – everything. All the – I don't know if 'support [ayuda]' is the most adequate word – everything that came from the government. And the government offered it because we'd previously demanded it, through organizing, through struggles in the street...¹⁸

The crux of neoliberal governance across the pond from crumbling Europe has its similarities to neoconservative policies such as the Big Society, in that it draws on unpaid work in contexts of unemployment. The supposed ideological differences between the socialist and heavily movement-inspired discourse of Christina Kirchner and the conservative and entrepreneurial discourse of David Cameron become somewhat more relative in the face of such programmes. Neoliberal governmentality, whether in contexts of more or less industrialised countries, whether in crumbling empires or colonial countries shaken by decades of dictatorships, needs to mobilise the social in new ways in order to make itself sustainable. Debt is no minor factor in such dynamics of primitive accumulation, and the question remains to what extent new cooperativisms and communitarianisms will support this accumulation – by enabling labour power to reproduce itself without wages or too much subsidy, providing a conveniently manageable reserve workforce for coming economic upturns. New models of entrepreneurial association that can switch populations off and on between production and reproduction, as crisis governments increasingly buy into the debt spirals that come with bailouts and so-called rescue plans.

¹⁸ Interview with Centro de Salud Comunitaria.

Crisis governance: articulations of individualism and communitarianism

The current European context, where democratic institutions, welfare and service industries have been established since decades, differs substantially from Argentine present and history. Yet within the European economic and social crisis some issues and struggles ferment that are akin to the Argentina of 2001: among them are debt, unemployment and self-organisation. While Europe and Latin America are perhaps moving in opposite directions with regards to economic power, social welfare and democratic institutions, there are some similar models of governance emerging on both continents. The new forms of communitarianism I am referring to can also be found beyond the UK and Argentina, as the ‘soft side’ of European crisis governance, with authoritarian and repressive state action as its pendant. In the face of huge popular contestation of bailouts and rescue plans, as seen notably in the Mediterranean zone around 2011/12/13, ignored by governments and international bodies that adorn themselves with the label of democracy, the new communitarianisms may also be seen to address the growing rejection of macro-political representation, offering disenchanted populations to opt into schemes of supposed self-representation and self-management.

As for the UK, it is clear that the Big Society will uphold class divisions while seeking to install a new ‘cooperative’ relation within them: neo-communitarian institutions are run on a mixture of charitable (or indeed forced, as with workfare) labour that is unpaid, as well as private enterprise. The state is sure to keep a grip on setup and management, whereby private contractors who are elected to manage resources reap great benefit – ‘free schools’ are not run in spaces owned by people, or operated as public services, rather it is parents who come to legitimise privatisation, by giving parents the ‘say’ over what kinds of teachers or lunches they want – teachers as much as lunches turning into commercial services here.

Such posings of big ‘community’ are a dream for those who can afford to shape the social via donations or regulations, and a nightmare for those whose workhouse it becomes. In its affirmation of the power of the small, the Big Society can function to prevent solidarities across constituencies while forcing them to cooperate on competitive grounds. Offering people a world of bad ‘choices’, packaged as autonomy, has little to do with community self-organisation. It aims to replace community organised initiatives with controllable, manufactured ones, wanting to govern by both

dividing and agglomerating groups of actors: keeping them busy with themselves and keeping them from noticing the larger decomposition of universalist mutualist institutions that is at stake.

These macropolitics of the crisis have produced a shift in political organizing, with institutions and processes of democratic constitution¹⁹ and alternative and solidarity-based economic models becoming central across affected countries. While up until around 2010, European struggles still focused largely on precarious and migrant labour, their stakes have changed with the crisis: the articulation of a new politics of reproduction and care meets new claims on the collective management of resources and institutions, and this shift concerns the micro- as well as the macro level.

New mechanisms of agglomeration hold increasingly non-self-reproducing capitalist societies together by rendering the social productive not just as undifferentiated mass but as specific and situated compositions. Neoliberal governance ‘takes care’ to adapt policies to local contexts and tailor-made programmes to fortify different ‘communities’ in their identity. A fragment of ‘Escape Routes’ puts agglomeration into historical context:

For de Tocqueville, democratic governments can only be distinguished from despotic rule through their effective deployment of technologies of ‘association’, i.e., technologies of governance must extend into everyday social relations between people.²⁰

Where the neo-liberal version of association draws on free labour and cooperation (as in post-fordism), its neo-communitarian tendency instrumentalises community and social association more broadly – beyond just work, as form of governing the social and its reproduction. To be sure, these two tendencies of liberal governance coexist, while strategies of accumulation differ and combine across these registers. Where individualist neoliberal tendencies make it difficult to distinguish self-care from self-exploitation, the new collective liberal politics makes it increasingly hard to distinguish the reproduction of communities and groups from the reproduction of the capitalist

¹⁹ These were at least the thematic axes marking two big activist gatherings in 2012. The Euro-mediterranean meeting ‘Agora99’ in Madrid, as well as the European Social Forum in Florence.

²⁰ Papadopoulos, D., N. Stephenson, et al. (2008). *Escape routes*. p.140

system at large.

Where subaltern people, mostly in non-industrialised and imperially dominated societies, are integrated into global circuits of exploitation via *chains* – of ‘primitive accumulation’, in Marxist terms – in current capitalist governance, they are often integrated via *networks* and *groups*. The effects coalesce: the capacity to self-generate resources or services is taken from people, whether it is via consumerism and competitive networking or via enforced labour and migration. Division and conflation complement each other in the regime of ‘flexible’ accumulation. The mutual support networks that are built in order to survive precarity and subalternity are traversed by value extraction chains, as capital taps into the social. This opens onto yet another way in which care needs to be thought in relation to neoliberal governance and precarity, as relating to the production of community. The making of family and care networks is a useful point of cross-analysis here, as are practices of passionate or aspirational cooperation.

Macro-political takes on ‘unpaid work’

Liberalisation agendas

As capitalism historically did with the labours of women and slaves (and continues to do in a modified form with women and migrants), it today increasingly draws on ‘free’ labour. Such economic undervaluing does not only concern unpaid reproductive work, nor even only labours that are poorly remunerated (such that they do not facilitate an income one can live off, relative to hours worked and price levels: unpaid extra hours, poverty wages, minimum wages, wage dumping or symbolic remuneration that does not correspond to anything like a living wage, an hourly rate on which one may live in a given place and time²¹), but also increasing amounts of *market-based* work that is entirely unpaid: what I call ‘free labour’ here.

Reproductive work is the paradigm for any such labour, yet the host of contemporary

²¹ The living wage in London is calculated via assessments of food, energy, travel and housing prices, accessibility and levels of benefits, and household size, for instance. At £8.30 in 2011, it is significantly higher than the National Minimum Wage (at 5.93£ in 2011). Endorsed by the Conservative party in the UK, the living wage appears to be a cheap way of replacing public sector wages with a lower-level wage regime that still claims to be fair (or a standard of living that is ‘low-cost, but acceptable’). Some major businesses and municipal public-private projects have adopted this wage regime in London, yet still only 3000 employees benefit from it in 2011. See London.gov (2011) Living Wage.

‘free’ voluntary or workfare work speaks of a new dynamic in capitalist accumulation. As Christina Morini says:

When we speak of the inequality of contemporary work in the cycle of flexible accumulation, we see that ‘unpaid work’ is adequate not only for describing domestic work, but a process which characterizes the essence of contemporary working activity in its totality.²²

Free labour becomes endemic in the crisis of contemporary capitalism: no longer can wages in the west/north stay at levels that make for a comfortable life, rather they come closer to the low wages of countries that were supposedly ‘developing’ towards the standards of advanced industrial countries. This is not just a matter of mishaps in financial gambling, but a systemic bug in the dynamics of accumulation: to extract value from women and slaves is no longer enough. Cultures of free labour spread to working and middle classes in the global north/west.

Increasingly, reports on free labour appear, offering comparative analyses of volumes of unpaid work done across different sectors and countries. In many instances, their use of the notion of ‘unpaid’ work is to be taken with a pinch of salt, as for instance with an OECD social, employment and migration working paper on ‘Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: Unpaid Work Around the World’²³. This report presents data that reveals the extent and distribution of ‘unpaid work’ across 29 countries globally. Based on time-budget studies, it shows that a very clear majority of such work is carried by women when it comes to home-based work:

Across the 29 countries for which data are available [...], people average 3.4 hours per 24-hour day on unpaid work, the equivalent of 14% of their total time [...] In all countries the main component of unpaid work is routine housework. [...] people spend on average 2 hours and 8 minutes per day on routine housework [...].²⁴

²² Morini, C. (2010). *El trabajo de cuidado como arquetipo del biocapitalismo*.

²³ Miranda, V. (2011), *Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: Unpaid Work Around the World*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No.116, OECD Publishing.

²⁴ Ibid, p.8

On the one hand, this average between women and men is of course misleading because ‘the gender gap is on average 2 hours and 28 minutes per 24-hours day’²⁵. More broadly however, we can question the politics of what comes to be called work in this study. Equally, the question of what comes to be considered ‘paid’ and ‘unpaid’ is a highly political matter:

Unpaid work is the production of goods and services by household members that are not sold on the market. Some unpaid work is for the consumption within the family, such as cooking, gardening and house cleaning. The products of unpaid work may also be consumed by people not living in the household, e.g. cooking a meal for visiting friends, helping in a soup kitchen for homeless people, mowing the lawn of an elderly relative, or coaching the local football team.²⁶

The problem here appears to be that unpaid work is primarily defined as community and family-based work, where even volunteering is meant as community service²⁷. While indeed this may appear technically correct, there is a political decision in calling reproductive or care work ‘unpaid’ (whilst family farm-work is not counted as unpaid work, for instance, even where it isn’t remunerated²⁸) whilst ignoring all the industry-based unpaid work (‘shadow work’ and internships) that increasingly sustains capitalist economies. Why wouldn’t ‘volunteering’ include unpaid internships? And why would ‘time spent looking for work, time spent in education, and homework’ appear as ‘paid work or study’ in this report? After all, these activities are as reproductive to industrialized societies as is cleaning.

Reading the OECD’s definitions of paid/unpaid reproductive and care work, one cannot but have a hunch that they will ultimately translate into a claim to convert this activity into market, and thus monetary terms, resulting in another wave of alienation of people from their own reproduction and community. Because ‘looking for jobs’ is not

²⁵ Ibid, p.11

²⁶ Ibid, p.7

²⁷ ‘Voluntary work, such as helping out neighbours, caring for older people or people with disabilities, supporting charities, assisting new immigrants, training sports teams, and administering schools, also contribute to societal well-being but are not included in the traditional economic measures’. Ibid, p.6

²⁸ The paper defines unpaid work as including ‘activities like routine household work (e.g. cooking, cleaning, and gardening), caring for children and other family and non- family members, volunteering, and shopping’. while ‘Paid work or study’ covers full-time and part-time jobs, unpaid work in family business/farm, breaks in the workplace, time spent looking for work, time spent in education, and homework’. Ibid, p.8

reproductive of a community wherein people still largely sustain themselves locally and without wages; neither is it ‘paid’ work however (unless the OECD is operating an improbable notion of ‘pay’ beyond monetary terms). The argument seems to be going in favour of an inclusion of unpaid work in measuring GDP, of acknowledging the economic value of such work:

[...] unpaid work – largely dominated by cooking, cleaning and caring – is an important contributor to societal well-being in ways that differ both between countries and between men and women. Our calculations suggest that between one-third and half is not accounted for in the traditional measures of all valuable economic activity in OECD countries well-being, such as GDP per capita.²⁹

While this resembles an argument many feminist economists have made – that the amount of unpaid reproductive work done exceeds the volume of market based exchanges in most societies, and should be valued in economic calculations as well as in real terms³⁰ – it does not proceed to question reproduction and free labour in situated ways and in their particular class and race based articulations. Unpaid work fuels not just wellbeing but also shadow economies where dirty work gets done by criminalized people, for instance – it fuels survival. One can turn the critique that Ulrike von Werlhof makes of Ivan Illich³¹ – for forgetting about women’s work in his definition of ‘shadow work’ – on its head: talking about women’s and community work without talking about free market-based labour does not give a clear picture of the faults in current economic categories either.

This may appear as a provocation in the face of the blatant invisibility of the value (human and economic) of care work generally, however it is an important differentiation to hold up to international agencies and neoliberal policies that push for more commercialisation of subsistence work. The matter at stake is that partial inclusion always only leads to a shifting of the differentiations and connotations via which subjects are governed and exploited, never to a redistribution in a more universal sense. Thus the

²⁹ Ibid, p.30

³⁰ Feminist economists do not necessarily or only call for reproductive work to be ‘integrated’ into economies via its subjection to the wage regime. See for instance Olympe (2010): *Issue on Care Economics*.

³¹ See Werlhof, C. V. (2010). *Vom Diesseits der Utopie. 1.1: ‘Schattenarbeit’ oder Hausarbeit? Zur Gegenwart und Zukunft von Arbeit. Eine feministische Kritik an Ivan Illich*.

politics of this report may speak to primitive accumulation rather than to struggles for other, redistributive economical models: ‘emerging economies’ should decrease their larger share of unpaid work. The likely solution the OECD as any other international development agency (with a certain agenda of post-colonial liberalisation) would propose is the ‘creation of jobs’ rather than a basic income, wages for housework or granting people more rights and access to resources for their subsistence.

Different economies, different work: autonomy and reproduction

What is unpaid in a money economy is not automatically ‘unpaid’ in a subsistence economy: what is reproductive of one type of society isn’t necessarily reproductive of another. The degree of autonomy of a labouring practice depends not on whether it is paid or not, but on its context, conditions and valorization more broadly. Thus taking a global sample of different countries and investigating ‘unpaid’ work therein appears to require a more differentiated analysis.

If we are to depart from a definition of ‘work’ that takes into account what neoliberal capitalism lives on, we have to operate a more political notion of ‘free labour’ as not just socially reproductive work or even ‘shadow’ work, but as including market-based unpaid work. In the context of neoliberalism, unpaid work comes to include internships, work placements, volunteering or workfare labour: the recent cycle of capitalist accumulation in the global North incorporates sociability, knowledges and affects towards their framing as matters of consumption and production.³² This is not a minor detail, since it substantially impacts the way work is structured and exploited. Partial claims for the remuneration of undervalued work only lead to a shifting around of capitalist exploitation between the usual suspects – slaves, women, migrants, working class, poor and precarious people – but not to challenging its logic, which is that there always needs to be unvalued productive activity from which to extract extra value.

It is clear that the wage only functions on the basis of such exclusions. If we wish to challenge this logic in statist terms, for instance by advocating a guaranteed income as radical distributive model, this needs to be articulated with broader practices of

³² As Bernard Stiegler has said of neoliberal political economy, proletarianization contemporarily passes through the transformation of embodied knowledges (and relations, I would add) into consumer objects, ‘[...] and the proletarians of the nervous system are no less deprived of knowledge than are the proletarians of the muscular system’. Stiegler, B. (2010), *For a new critique of political economy*. p.45

reappropriation, and moreover on a transnational scale³³: a politics of encouraging reproductive autonomy and subsistence by encouraging local autonomy, as articulated with macropolitical and economic transformations, would amount to nothing less than a revolution, that's to say a radical systemic change. It seems clear that neither struggles for wages nor philanthropy can imagine a sustainable redistributive economic model.

How to avert romanticized views both of subsistence and of 'progress'? It clearly helps to put both those terms into perspective, recognising that neither exists in a pure form: reproduction indeed always hinges on broader networks and exchanges. As one feminist report says:

[...] there is a view deeply entrenched in the modernisation narrative of a linear path along which all countries move with an inevitable shift from 'private' provision of care, especially family and voluntary, to public provision by the state and market. The assumption is that developing countries cluster into so-called highly 'familialistic regimes', where both welfare and care are assured through family networks and relations. While not wanting to deny the important role played by families, and by unpaid work within families, in providing care, focusing exclusively on families and households can also be misleading. [...] There is a great diversity among developing countries [...]. Some of these countries are relatively high-capacity states, both fiscally and administratively, which have been involved in the provisioning of social and care services and social protection measures historically [...].³⁴

In addressing questions of reproduction in the terms of mainstream economics, it is easy to forget about redistributive systems and the role of public institutions in care provision, making for an apparent choice between unpaid private work and market based paid work. It is this logic I mean to criticise here: the neoliberal logic where an economic reading replaces a political one. This resonates with the logic of liberal care described earlier:

³³ For a critique, albeit a rather technical one, of the basic income, see Flassbeck, H., Dieter, F., Meinhardt, V. and Vesper, D. (2012) 'Die falsche Solidarität: Warum das Konzept des bedingungslosen Grundeinkommen nicht aufgeht', in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Deutsche Ausgabe, November 2012, p.3

³⁴ WIDE/ Women in Development Europe (2009) *Conference Report*.

The liberal perspective values citizens as paid workers and/or public figures [...], the prevailing neoliberal perspective draws on the earlier concept of citizen [...] although it refocuses citizenship on people's relation to the market. Citizens are defined as autonomous, privatised persons, with a focus on caring for themselves.³⁵

In this context, citizens and paid workers become consumers, responsible for their own well-being, with the choice of caring for themselves in two ways: 'they can either try to substitute unpaid care with paid care or they can substitute paid work with unpaid care work'³⁶. This is the poisonous choice between market competitiveness that entails a double/triple burden, and an invisibilized, dependent existence in the face of those who have access to money. It is a choice that not only women are forced to make with regards to their homes and families, though following the sixties many women have opted for the emotional and work culture of their fathers over that of their mothers, in the global north, as Arlie Russel Hochschild puts it. The 'colonial arrangement between the "metropolis" of my father's world and the native village of my mother's'³⁷: a powerful metaphor for some, a painfully accurate description for others. People in less capitalistically developed countries are equally confronted with the token choice of neoliberalism: between an impoverished subsistence at the margins of increasingly enclosed lands, and engaging with NGOs or sweatshop work in emergent local industries; between being an invisible, impoverished subject in reserve or being a competing economic actor. Yet this choice is fake in the first place, since one option implies the other in the absence of redistributive systems, making for different versions of precarity.

Nonprofits and capitalist 'community'

The role of voluntary organizations is key in postcolonial societies, extending governance to 'emerging economies' via gentle means. Historically speaking, the voluntary sector can be traced back to the function of missionaries in colonial societies, offering medical, educational and various other services by means of inscribing their cultural and organizational forms in the colonized society. As Miranda Joseph argues in her book 'Against the Romance of Community':

³⁵ Ibid, p.9

³⁶ Ibid, p.17

³⁷ Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life : notes from home and work*. p .5

A reckoning with nonprofit organisations is inevitable in this project on the relationship of community with capitalism. Nonprofits would appear to have a very important relation to community. [...] In my research process, wherever I looked for community, what I found were nonprofits. [...] Nonprofits are supposed to be *not* for profit – the capital they accumulate cannot be distributed as profit – but they are also not non-capitalist and especially not anticapitalist. Nonprofits are often posited as the institutional form in which community complements capital. [...] Largely run on women’s voluntary and low-waged labor and providing services once thought to be women’s work (religion, education, social welfare), nonprofits might be seen as a site of reproduction that supports for-profit production in much the way women’s domestic labour has done.³⁸

One might thus come to see non-profits as operating processes of primitive accumulation not only upon those who they ‘serve’ (by bringing them in touch with micro-credits, ideological or religious cultures from the dominant world, educational services or technological ‘advancements’, all of which profoundly restructure the way work, life and relationalities function), but the very work they do may be seen as part of a parallel dynamic of this kind, whereby formerly reproductive work of women comes to be streamlined in organisations that complement capitalist development.

To describe nonprofits as the mechanism that manages or facilitates a relation – supplementarity – that is not only about facilitation but also as much about displacement, is to describe a mechanism that is quite contradictory and multivalent. It would be much easier to argue that nonprofits are what Althusser calls ideological state apparatuses, that they generate individual and communal subjectivity for capitalism. [...] But to tell only that story would flatten the supplementary relation between community and capitalism, reducing community to an element of the capitalist structure, as if that structure were whole. [...] Nonprofits often articulate desires not met by capitalism for specific goods – religion, education, health care, arts, social services, or social change – but also often for an alternative mode of production, namely, gift exchange. While economists read nonprofit production as complementary with for-profit

³⁸ Jospeh, M. (2002) Against the Romance of Community. p.70

production (it provides goods that for-profit production and the state do not provide [...]), insofar as the 'good' provided by nonprofits is 'community', nonprofits do not merely complement the market and the state but rather mark the absent center of capitalism.³⁹

Joseph argues that the exponential growth of government formalization of voluntary activity can be witnessed at moments when there seems to be impending danger of radical self-organized activity that may pose a challenge to hegemonic power. She argues that as civil society fills the void at the center of capitalism, providing that which capitalism cannot embody, it serves to manage and contain tendencies towards communism. This resonates with Donzelot's historical description of the relation between family and philanthropy:

Among other preoccupations, it [the Société philanthropique de Paris] was motivated by the concern to struggle against the habit of subscribers of using up what remained from the yearly allotments in community festivals, whereas by saving they could gradually do without the donations of private benevolence. The logic of saving was always the same: reduce the organic, festive, transfamilial forms of solidarity so as to eliminate the risk of dependence as well as the parallel risk of insurrection.⁴⁰

Philanthropy undoes the communal in favour of a subtle privatized system of dependence. Following this tradition, the non-profit sector may be said to embody a distorted echo of communism at the heart of capitalism, keeping in check people's desires for meaningful self-organization, shared creativity and care.

Self-organisation and self-governance

From the point of view of social movements too, the non-profit sector represents a powerful threat of capture, one that has to be resisted in various ways. The question of autonomy from external funding, of avoiding dependency on state and market is a complicated one. As do NGOs, public institutions increasingly have to argue for their distribution of funding via accounts of service use, funds raised, boxes ticked for

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 72-73

⁴⁰ Donzelot, J. (1979). *The Policing of families*. p.66

minorities and special categories of users/participants. Particularly in the cultural sector, such protocols become ever more crucial to receiving funds (whether from public bodies or private foundations), making those with the best grant-writing skills and ‘happy-liberal-bullshit’ (Joseph) language the most likely to access monies. Non-profit initiatives are liable to their funders, which are mostly a combination of private and public bodies. How, if at all, may a radically democratic politics be built on the ruins of public institutions or on the slippery slopes of the NGO world?

Speaking about social movements reliance on external funding in a 2011 interview, Nizaia feels ambivalent. The relations of dependency that come with access to public funds inscribe social movements and their processes and projects into a productive framework whereby much energy goes into negotiations about representation, process and finalities. Throughout the noughties, the Spanish movements at stake here strongly drew on collaborations with Museums such as the Reina Sofia or MACBA. Nizaia narrates this relation to institutions from the point of view of someone coming to Spain from Mexico:

For me, my impression was that in Europe, everything was already very ready made [hecho]. For example, my feeling was – in the period before the cuts of 2011 – let’s say in 2000, during the whole period of the 90s, 2000s and so on, many things were subsidized. Many grants for topics to do with ‘migration’ or ‘women’ – but then one had to produce, because that’s what one got the funding for... sometimes it wasn’t clear if that was exactly what we wanted to do. So, super-institutionalized political practices, because we knew that the money we could count on would come from there... so it was like...this institutionalization of life, because you know you count on a backing from the state; well that has good sides but is also has some bad sides. It is like everything is already too ready made and prescribed...⁴¹

The links between Spanish post-autonomous movements of the period mentioned by Nizaia, and public cultural institutions has enabled many processes that could not have happened without institutional funding and backing: organizing international encounters, conferences, lobbying for social centres, publications, and so forth. The

⁴¹ Interview with Nizaia.

question of the role of institutions was already rife then, as movements tried to evaluate their relations to existing as well as self-created institutions. This politics shifts to give rise to a broader questioning of democratic institutions with new movements: the fact that culture and education were the first sectors to see budget cuts in Europe surely contributes to this shift. The decline of the politics of creativity that I trace here is no doubt related to this, as the social movements in question stopped to cater to the arts field, opening up to emergent processes of broad social mobilisation and democratic revolutions.

The thread of institutional critique and invention is not lost however, and interesting articulations emerge across the public and democratic contexts. As Pantxo, a member of the Universidad Nómada which has been a key actor in relation to the mentioned museums, says:

[...] with the collapse of the welfare state we started to need forms of coordination that wouldn't reduce difference to homogeneity but at the same time should take charge of a continuous form of... governance, if you want... positive... governance is a word that in that period was very marked by a negative element, but then still... of an autonomous management, a self-management, a self-governance in this sense.⁴²

'Governance' is mostly associated with the state and corporate power, with protocols of management and control that disempower those with less privilege and voice. It has emerged as an analytical term relating to neoliberal management of conduct. At its base it means 'the action or manner of governing' – 'to govern' meaning to conduct, constitute or regulate (laws, processes, actions, organizational forms, etc.). The need for another way of seeing governance in relation to autonomy, and for bringing together practices of networks with those of institutions, becomes particularly evident in the moment when public and democratic structures are in a shake-up, with broad networked movements such as the 15M calling for their reform. The question within social movements is how to respond to neoliberal paradigms of governance and capture with autonomous, self-made rules and protocols – among recent experiments in the Spanish context is a new party model based on copyleft and movement protocols (the 'Partido

⁴² Interview with Pantxo.

del Futuro'⁴³), several new platforms for organising such as the 'Mareas' (tides) that bring together struggles against privatisation in different areas (resembling a new form of unionism, as some have insinuated⁴⁴), or a new local model of networked organising called 'En Red'.⁴⁵

There is a growing need for new protocols of mutualism, association and shared practice. Collectively articulated organisational models, network rules and ethics codes⁴⁶ take on a new importance in this context of building new institutions, as do new micro-political understandings of transformations within movements and everyday spaces. As one Spanish feminist blog project of 2013 puts it:

In the attack on the conditions through which we reproduce our existence, exclusions that blur the features of the classical *outsider* are produced. At each step it is harder to know how much longer the loose chord on which we tread will last. How long before the next eviction or the raid? [...] How long before care-workers and handicapped people will be subjected to a logic wherein the only route to care will be that of the market and/or family? How long until our poor, but important articulation of the *welfare state* that constitutes our public sphere will be undone? And how long until we get on a plane that takes us to another country?

Yet in the midst of generalized disorganisation we also note that there's excitement about the new forms of resistance and struggle emerging from the heat of the *crisis*. [...] New micro-worlds are built, survival strategies proliferate with the accelerated speed of cuts, privatisations and evictions, and new questions and forums for thinking about them open up. [...] We pass – not without contradictions and ambivalences – from fear to sadness to the bravery and happiness of being with others; from the practices of small collective territories to massive mobilisations; from micropolitical perspectives to debates around institutionality.

⁴³ See Partido del Futuro website, and Zechner, M. (2013) *An der Zukunft ruetteln und schuettern*. In: *Kulturrisse* 1/2013.

⁴⁴ See Madrilonia (2013) *Son las Mareas un nuevo Sindicalismo?* Madrilonia Blog.

⁴⁵ See En Red Website.

⁴⁶ See Precarious Workers Brigade (2012) 'April 2012 Ethics Code draft' published on Blog.

[...] The hegemonic discourse of white man, efficient in its search for capitalist benefit, takes life to mean self-sufficiency. To understand life from the viewpoint of its precarity allows us to see the contradiction between this understanding of life and its embodied realities, which mutually depend on one another.⁴⁷

These transversal connections across macro- and micropolitics, and the operation of precarity as concept across those registers, in some ways paraphrase where this research is going: from the concerns about work and organising during the years of neoliberal individualisation and subsumption, towards the ways in which life itself comes to be re-thought in relation to the vulnerabilities that the crisis produces (and back again). Precarity remains a prism through which to read these changes, and feminist perspectives such as this one – linked to the trajectory of ex-members of *Precarias a la Deriva* – open ways of thinking care and the creation of new worlds. In the following and last chapter, I re/visit some points of inspiration towards practices of commoning and institution-building, as emerging from my interviews.

In this chapter we have explored the nexus of neoliberal and neo-communitarian governance, as they are articulated through care, philanthropy and free labour. Starting from an analysis of how neoliberal governance encompasses new cycles of primitive accumulation by mobilising the social and drawing on free labour, this took us to pay some attention to the entwining of neoliberalism and neo-communitarianism. The functions of competition and division, combined with those of agglomerating and conflating the social, make for what some name a new era of governance: I have posited some reflections and speculations on the articulations of this with the current politics of crisis.

As such, we have seen some of the complexities of neoliberal governance and its current challenges, as articulated through the organisational practices of autonomy and commoning. In the following chapter, which is the last in my enquiry, I give more space to those practices of social movement as occurring within a context of crisis in Europe, looking at imaginaries and experiments of organisation and institution-building, pointing to the ways in which autonomy therein comes to be redefined in relation to

⁴⁷ Vidas Precarias (2013), *Interrogando la 'crisis' desde los feminismos*. *Diagonal Blog*, 21st February 2013. My translation from Spanish.

heteronomy.

C.2. Autonomous reproduction and commoning

Perhaps for too long a time we thought that life belongs to us. That it belongs to each of us, individually. As if consciousness were sufficient in order to exist, isolated from the world, locked up in oneself. As if bodies didn't touch one another right from the beginning. As if thoughts, dreams and desires weren't part of a shared world. The hegemonic discourse of white man, efficient in its search for capitalist benefit, takes life to mean self-sufficiency. To understand life from the viewpoint of its precarity allows us to see the contradiction between this understanding of life and its embodied realities, which mutually depend on one another.¹

Autonomy is not a fixed, essential state. Like gender, autonomy is created through its performance, by doing/becoming; it is a political practice. To become autonomous is to refuse authoritarian and compulsory cultures of separation and hierarchy through embodied practices of welcoming difference... Becoming autonomous is a political position for it thwarts the exclusions of proprietary knowledge and jealous hoarding of resources, and replaces the social and economic hierarchies on which these depend with a politics of skill exchange, welcome, and collaboration. Freely sharing these with others creates a common wealth of knowledge and power that subverts the domination and hegemony of the master's rule.²

Re-thinking autonomy and heteronomy

The invention of political practices and forms that can subvert and undo neoliberal techniques of governance is in many ways contingent on a complex and political thinking of power. Not just the way power shapes and marks bodies and manages them

¹ Vidas Precarias (2013) *Interrogando la 'crisis' desde los feminismos*.

² subRosa (2003). *Introduction: Practicing cyberfeminisms*, in M. Fernandez, F. Wilding, M.M. Wright (eds.). *Domain errors! Cyberfeminist practices*. New York: Autonomedia.

as populations (biopower and biopolitics), or the sovereign power of the state in designating subjects as within or beyond spheres of rights; nor just the way ‘power-with’ and ‘power-from-within’ (as Starhawk names the positive dimensions of power³) inform practices of caring relations to ones environment (witchcraft, ritual, community building, spiritual practices), or the way self-care can undo subjectivation and control. In the complex field of simultaneous neoliberal individualisation and association, power needs to be understood as both negative and positive, and a politics grappling with it thus needs to make new affirmations and refusals of autonomy and heteronomy possible, differentiating between what we may call practices of ‘living’ and ‘dead’ labour (Karl Marx), information (Matteo Pasquinelli) and communication (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) and, I would add, also experience and collectivity. ‘Living’ forms enable (individual as well as collective) subjects to act, to recognize potentiality, individuate and compose with others – they give energy and life. ‘Dead’ forms produce isolation, repetition without difference, impuissance, merely allowing one to imagine ones place in actuality as given, as social fact – they tend to death, merely taking or extracting from subjects without increasing their capacities to act.

In their recent characterization of subjectivities of the current crisis⁴, Hardt and Negri refer to the importance of differentiating living from dead forms not just in relation to work but also to information and communication (‘dead’ communication meaning floods or bits of information that don’t enable you to act or compose with others in new ways, ‘living’ information being that which allows for new modes of relation and thus also movement and action). I extend this analogy in referring to experiences and collective practices in proposing to differentiate between those that affirm and enable life and those that remain stuck to given configurations of overproduction, exhaustion and exploitation. At a basic level, the question of what is living and dead may be seen as a matter of feeling and sensing as much as analysing the pharmacological and affirmative potentials of relations. The framing of practices in terms of experiences and experiments is conducive to such an understanding of the way forces within subjects are set in motion, being a matter of processes, affects and effects produced along the way, not just of goals and efficiencies.

³ Starhawk (1990 [1987]). *Truth or dare : encounters with power, authority, and mystery*, San Francisco ; London : Harper & Row.

⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*.

It is practices of making ones own law at the same time as composing with those of others that point the way to caring and creative ways of relating to lifedrink. If we are to invest in ‘autonomy’ as a concept and practice, it must put into question not only the abstract ideas that underpin our systems of justice, and in extension of democracy – such as independence, individualised responsibility – but also the everyday ways in which these notions come to be embodied – our ways of relating and depending on each other. The very basis upon which our ideas of ‘autonomy’ are built in the west is marked by hierarchies of labour and power, by notions of ‘freedom’ being constituted by the ability to not have to care about others, to be unconstrained by their conventions (which often means to effectively be superior to others, that is to dominate). In relation to reproduction and commoning, I refer to practices that incorporate an ethics of care while at the same time being able to think autonomous reproduction. In the context marked by individualisation and competitiveness as well as opportunistic association and manufactured collectivity, a set of micropolitical differentiations around autonomy and heteronomy come in handy.

One point of departure for such analysis is that ‘the contemporary fragmentation of care renders the real foundations of the political ‘autonomy’ of some [people] invisible, [...] which at the end of the day turn out to be flatly a matter of being more powerful rather than more autonomous.’⁵ The autonomous subject is one that’s able to relate and negotiate with others, not merely to impose its will. To confuse autonomy with power as *potere* is to replicate the very notion of ‘freedom’ that underlies the aspiration to wealth, property possession and careless consumerism – a freedom based on competition and dominance. Whether in anarchist movements or laissez-faire economics, the notion that an absence of structure or governance will lead processes into their most natural and horizontal form is deeply flawed. Autonomy needs to face up to heteronomy (our dependence on others and their conventions) in ways other than trying to eradicate (which would be to dominate) or to escape it: this means facing up to questions around positive governance and power.

Within the Autonomist Marxist tradition, many (particularly feminists) have undertaken to write heteronomy into autonomy, to develop a concept of autonomy that includes

⁵ Raid, L. (2009), *Care et Politique chez Joan Tronto*, in: Molinier, Laugier and Paperman (eds.): Qu’est-ce que le care? p.60

heteronomy. In the face of a debilitating neoliberal ‘politics of freedom’⁶ that seeps into all spaces of work and life, the concept of ‘autonomy’ is not easily reclaimed. In this context, addressing care and heteronomy becomes urgent: dealing with dispersion, individualization, alienation and competition, an affirmation of *heteronomy* as our dependence on others needs to have the larger systemic context of charity and neo-communitarianism in mind. Affirmative ways of thinking interdependency are crucial for inventing new collective practices and forms of governance. In approaching a corresponding politics, the stakes consist not only in developing new forms of common re/production, but also in struggling within and against state and market forces.

Contrary to a confusion of *autonomy* with limited responsibility or the ability to exert power, the creation of one’s own laws is inevitably a common project, since it takes more than one to make a law or set of guidelines valid within a social field: if *nomos* is to be more than an aspiration or individual resolution, it has to open itself to others, beyond an auto-referential politics of autonomy. Governance in this sense may be understood as the collective practice of minding and managing one’s reproduction, within as well as beyond a capitalist context.

In the neoliberal moment, many definitions of autonomy take care to shift the focus onto questions around interdependence. For instance, the *Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional* of Rosario in Argentina formulates their concept of autonomy as different from ideas of *laissez-faire*:

Autonomy, from the Greek ‘autos’ (oneself) and ‘nomos’ (law, accord, norm, contract, convention) means ‘to give ourselves our own law’ and implies a whole establishment of rules in which those upon whom those rules have effect participate. The notion of autonomy contrasts with that of spontaneity, *laissez faire* or independence: once it is established collectively, in order for us to be able to speak of autonomy, ‘nomos’ has to have a power of law for all and everyone, at least until a new collective instance wherein it can be re-examined.⁷

This resonates with how Margarita Padilla and Raquel Mezquita define autonomy:

⁶ Interview with Nizaia.

⁷ Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional de Rosario (date unknown) *En los Inicios de la Practica Institucional*, unpublished. My translation from Spanish.

Very briefly, ‘autonomy’ means that ‘we’, collectively and at the margin of the imposed system of dominance, possess the sole productive capacity: cooperation. When the desire for communism is strong, we can ‘separate ourselves’ from the system while taking with us its very productive capacity (cooperation) and construct autonomous spaces where social relations aren’t of the character of domination. Autonomous spaces form networks of counter-power that reproduce social life independently of systems of domination, and their priority isn’t to confront ‘the enemy’ and win but to proliferate until the systems of domination ‘are left to themselves’. Naturally, ‘autonomy’ isn’t a sweet voyage to utopia, but a process of struggles against all those forces that reduce, block and decrease the desire for communism and, since it is ‘us’ who reproduce these forces, also for struggle against ourselves.⁸

Thus the notion of autonomy as taken up in the context of these struggles is very aware of questions of reproduction, yet these are laid out primarily in relation to more visible or macro-political matters. Mezquita and Padilla point out that in network societies in general, struggles around autonomy are caught up in ways of doing things that are still rather masculine, unable to face care and reproduction in their very everyday and embodied dimensions. This merits a glance at the notion of heteronomy, which has long embodied those dimensions, and which is mostly rejected in Autonomist discourses. The Laboratorio of Rosario for instance formulates heteronomy as problematic dependence:

Heteronomy is the law (nomos) that comes from the other (héteros). A situation would be heteronomous when those that participate in an experience don’t participate in the construction of the norms that organise it.⁹

Care relates to this question of heteronomy in a somewhat interesting way. Care becomes relevant – urgent and problematic – in the moment where there is clear dependence on another, a vulnerability, an impossibility of quite establishing or enacting one’s own rules, and consequently the need to draw on others and to confront their rules and conventions. Such heteronomy can correspond to moments of extreme

⁸ Padilla, M. and Mesquita, R. (2006), *Penelope: tejiendo y destejiendo la red.*

⁹ Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional de Rosario, *En los Inicios de la Practica Institucional.*

tension and crisis, or also to everyday disability: it entails a becoming or being ‘subject to different laws’ (another definition of ‘heteronomy’), a confrontation with conventions other than one’s own. This is the experience of care-receiving as well as care-giving: the inevitability of facing the other and their cultural conventions, the fact of having to adapt to the needs of another.

Thus in its most negative sense, heteronomy may mean being caught in habits that one did not choose, being stuck in the world of another. Yet worse than being stuck in the world of another is to be stuck in the world of no one, to be alienated from one’s experience and surroundings, caught in ‘dead’ work, communications and laws – in relations that seem to have no subjects or stakes, where our words and actions have no target or effect. In everyday life however, most people cannot afford not to participate in the worlds of others, having to necessarily experience moments of vulnerability and dependency in order to get by materially, socially and emotionally. Thus heteronomy and vulnerability are keys to a politics of care that can risk transversality, facing the other. As the first quote opening this chapter testifies, the accentuated precarity and collective mobilisations that come with the crisis make this sense of mutually dependent lives tangible in new ways, opening to new political sensitivities.

Theorizing precarity and reproduction (Federici)

We remember precarity as the state of depending on prayer and charity, of being radically dependent on the other, and quite continuously too. With this in mind, we may again put into question various Marxist-Autonomist theories that stress the liberatory potential of post-Fordist, cognitarian, cultural, info- or immaterial labour, and the autonomy of production that is affirmed therein. As Federici points out in her critique of such politics of precarity, those theorizations speak only of and to subjects deemed ‘productive’ within the dominant model of valorization, and thus miss the point of seeing reproduction, and consequently of inventing sustainable practices of resistance. Built into Autonomist theories of the liberation of labour is the notion that wage labour will eventually exceed and transform itself – yet beyond blurry utopianisms, such theories are often incapable of thinking reproductive or caring labour in the present. Federici critically sums up dominant theorizations of precarity:

Autonomous Marxists believe this development is also creating a new kind of “common” originating from the fact that immaterial labor presumably represents

a leap in the socialization and homogenization of work. The idea is that differences between types of work that once were all important (productive/reproductive work e.g.; agricultural/industrial/”affective labor”) are erased, as all types work (as a tendency) become assimilated, for all begin to incorporate cognitive work. Moreover, all activities are increasingly subsumed under capitalist development, they all serve to the accumulation process, as society becomes an immense factory. Thus, e.g. the distinction between productive and unproductive labor also vanishes. This means that capitalism is not only leading us beyond labor, but it is creating the conditions for the “commonization” of our work experience, where the divisions are beginning to crumble.¹⁰

The abolishing of capitalist work does not automatically entail the abolition of a gendered or indeed racialised division of labour (and as such measures like the basic income too have to be thought in relation to feminist and decolonial strategies). While it is important to trace the lines of complicity and articulation between capitalism and patriarchy, the two also need to be thought separately. This is where movements that try to transform relations of work and life towards more egalitarian and sustainable models fail, if they operate a notion that capitalism (in its dissolution) will ultimately lead into egalitarian relational dynamics:

My first criticism is that this theory is built on a faulty understanding of how capitalism works. It sees capitalist development as moving towards higher forms of production and labor. [...] The fundamental principle is that capitalist development is always at the same time a process of underdevelopment. Maria Mies describes it eloquently in her work: “What appears as development in one part of the capitalist faction is underdevelopment in another part.” This connection is completely ignored in this theory [...]

Another criticism I have against the precarious labor theory is that it presents itself as gender neutral. It assumes that the reorganization of production is doing away with the power relations and hierarchies that exist within the working class on the basis of race, gender and age, and therefore it is not concerned with

¹⁰ Federici, Silvia (2006): *Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint*, lecture at Bluestockings Radical Bookstore in New York City, October 28th 2006.

addressing these power relations; it does not have the theoretical and political tools to think about how to tackle them. [...] My concern is that the Negrian theory of precarious labor ignores, bypasses, one of the most important contributions of feminist theory and struggle, which is the redefinition of work, and the recognition of women's unpaid reproductive labor as a key source of capitalist accumulation. In redefining housework as WORK, as not a personal service but the work that produces and reproduces labor power, feminists have uncovered a new crucial ground of exploitation that Marx and Marxist theory completely ignored.¹¹

We are back to the question of what work is, and why sustained attention and struggle around reproduction is indispensable: why we need to move beyond 'work' (as waged labour) while at the same time looking for 'work' elsewhere (in the home, the shadow economies). It is a dead-end to stress 'work' and rights without paying attention to how we actually live and support each other in the everyday.

Federicis arguments are an invaluable source for addressing how we relate collectivity, care and creativity. She concludes her problematization of precarity with a section called 'Creating Self-Reproducing Movements':

As every aspect of everyday life was re-understood in its potential for liberation and exploitation, we saw the many ways in which women and women's struggles are connected. We realized the possibility of "alliances" we had not imagined and by the same token the possibility of bridging the divisions that have been created among women, also on the basis of age, race, sexual preference. We cannot build a movement that is sustainable without an understanding of these power relations. We also need to learn from the feminist analysis of reproductive work because no movement can survive unless it is concerned with the reproduction of its members. This is one of the weaknesses of the social justice movement in the US.

We go to demonstrations, we build events, and this becomes the peak of our struggle. The analysis of how we reproduce these movements, how we reproduce ourselves is not at the center of movement organizing. It has to be.

¹¹ Ibid.

We need to go back to the historical tradition of working class organizing “mutual aid” and rethink that experience, not necessarily because we want to reproduce it, but to draw inspiration from it for the present. We need to build a movement that puts on its agenda its own reproduction. The anti-capitalist struggle has to create forms of support and has to have the ability to collectively build forms of reproduction¹².

It is with a reflection on practices of what I call autonomous reproduction, or militant heteronomy perhaps, that I want to conclude my research and writing in the framework of this thesis. The subject offers infinite possibilities of exploration and infinite examples, yet at stake here are the concrete practices and voices I have drawn on in building this narrative and analysis. Just as autonomy and heteronomy, or militancy and reproduction seem to be non-negotiable with each other, so do care and creativity appear as spectral opposites and incombinate strategies. The point here is to show and imagine how they indeed can go together, how practices can sustain themselves on an understanding of their ecology.

Autonomous reproduction in times of crisis

What will replace the institutional and ‘public’ powers that took care of large scale social reproduction before austerity measures led to the closing down of schools, hospitals, charities and so forth? What new forms of pastoral power need to emerge in order to meet this crisis of social reproduction, which is not only a ‘crisis of care’ in the sense of an ageing of populations in industrialized nations, not a crisis of shortage in any real terms but rather one of distribution? In this crisis, where the reproduction of whole social bodies is at stake (the patient will live or die), work and life come to blur even more, yet this time with a difference.

As there is less employment, self-organisation becomes vital to the survival of groups and communities who until then relied upon public funding. It is more difficult for state and market to figure out how to draw surplus value out of activities that aren’t categorizable as work, as clearly even the Big Society or Argentinian Cooperativism depend on the activation and management of work as employment (whether paid or

¹² Ibid.

unpaid). Self-organising activity that refuses to be framed as work escapes state and market in this sense, or may at best be captured as consumerism. If there is potential in the blurring of life and work in times of crisis, its realisation will depend on sustainable models for breaking the divisions between work and leisure in the everyday.

As echoed previously, the current economic and social crisis also entails a crisis of representation. Those who find themselves at the edges of the shrinking public sphere no longer feel any links to those who administer the state, whose ties to markets and finance have clearly led them to give in to policies of dismantling welfare and social rights, and whose policies come to resemble the structural adjustment applied to Africa throughout the neoliberal era. ‘They don’t represent us’ [No nos representan] is a slogan that echoes beyond the Spanish movement that started on 15th May 2011 across the global movements of resistance. Two focal points of this crisis are existing institutions and new forms of organisation, enabling practices that combine a new institutional politics with movement-based organisational forms. In getting at this context, I will first explore the proposal of ‘Institutions of the Commons’ and draw on imaginaries and proposals around Cooperatives.

Institutions of the Commons: an experimental dispositive (Spain)

Nicolas Sguigla, in a text written for a meeting about social movement networks and their relations to cultural institutions¹³, speaks about the self-organised social center ‘La Casa Invisible’ in Malaga as an experiment of an institution of the commons. In his text, he asks: ‘Is it possible to imagine an unfinished institution, where the instituting always prevails over the instituted?’¹⁴ The proposal of such institutions of the commons – emerging notably from Spain and Italy around 2007, no doubt intuiting the crisis of institutions, work and representation – proposes institutionality beyond the state: as spaces of self-management that take on lasting organisational and administrative tasks and forms, adapting to a long term temporality and forging a self-understanding as provider of everyday support and services, in combining different initiatives and forms of activity in a democratically run, decentralized fashion.

Points of reference here are the ‘Okupa movements’ (the Squatting movement) of the Spanish 1980/90s as well as workers self-run institutions as they appeared during

¹³ This process ran from 2010 to 2011 via meetings organised by the Universidad Nomada and Museo Reina Sofia in Spain, and brought together a range of mostly Spanish actors.

¹⁴ Sguigla, N. (2011), *La Casa Invisible*, in *Carta No.2.*, Madrid: Reina Sofia.

different cycles of struggle in the 20th century. The commons differ from ‘public’ resources: ‘the public is nothing but the mystification of the common’, that which legitimises the private, ‘that which belongs to everyone but in reality belongs to no one, that is, what belongs to the state’.¹⁵ The commons in this interpretation is what actually belongs to everyone, what can be used and inhabited by anyone without mediation by the state or other agencies.

This proposal departs from a concern with questions of metastability, invention and care. Simondon takes the concept of metastability from physics and develops his in his theory of individuation, as meaning the state of a system that is accessible to change: as Massumi puts it, a ‘fragile, provisional equilibrium that is subject to constant perturbation’.¹⁶ We may have Alberto Toscano’s words in mind when we ask, in relation to institutions and precarity:

Deleuze says: “what primarily defines a metastable system, is the existence of a “disparation”, at least of two orders of magnitude, two disparate scales of reality, between which there is not yet any interactive communication”. Could one ever qualify this disparate metastability as “common”? Simondon and Deleuze offer a conception of politics as the invention of a communication between initially impossible series; as invention of a common that is not given in advance and which emerges on an ontological background of inequality.¹⁷

The proposal of institutions of the commons is thus concerned with metastability in several ways: as systems that are open to transformation, high in energy and as such both vulnerable to entropy as well as rich in potentials for new individuations. Precarity here presents itself as enabling vulnerability, with the potential of producing new alliances and compositions, and thus new individuations and processes of subjectivation. Institutions of the commons may be seen as experimental sites for the potential becoming-common and structuration of disparate subjectivities.

¹⁵ See also Negri, A. and Revel, J. (2010) *Comunismo/Instituciones de lo Comun*. Malaga: ULEX/La Invisible/Equipaje Dmano pp.27-28. My translation from Spanish.

¹⁶ Massumi, B. (2009) ‘Technical’ Mentality revisited: an Interview with Brian Massumi. In: *Parrhesia* No.07/2009.

¹⁷ Toscano, A. (2007) *The Disparate: Ontology and Politics in Simondon*. Paper delivered at the Forum for European Philosophy annual conference, University of Sussex, 9 September 2007.

The Casa Invisible, with its combination of constituents, spaces and projects may be seen as such a tentative at allowing the common to emerge, or in any case creating a space for commoning: the buffet run by transmigrants (often without papers); the office for social rights run by people related to the left, unions and law; the bookshop and cafeteria run by young precarious militants and migrants; the creative copyleft hub for cultural production; the events space and bar; the meeting rooms used by social movement, feminist, schizoanalysis, housing rights and various other groups.

Common institutions also relate to metastability in the sense of their openness to change, and thus to duration. Where traditional institutions are inscribed in a temporality of eternity and of the absolute authority of the state, common institutions are situated experiments in cohesion and provision, whereby people take on the responsibility of care and management of resources of a larger social group. Unlike isolated activist experiments, there is an engagement with the social and the local here that reaches somewhat subcultural concerns, as well as an engagement with governance and the relation to the state. Indeed such institutions are complementary to the context of networks¹⁸, constituting metastable points of aggregation and continuity in an attempt at negotiating the network logic with that of structure.

In this attempt at imagining unfinished and open institutions within which subjectivity gets produced and looked after, there is no strong opposition between institutions and networks, or structure and structurelessness but an attempt to think them together. What matters is not whether there are structures, rules and protocols or not, rather it matters what they do: as the Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional of Rosario points out in their account of an institutional analysis in a school: '[...] verifying the factual existence of an institution (matching administrative requirements, undertaking programmed activities as planned, be in a regular relation to the affairs of the state) does not allow us to deduce that there's subjectivity being produced.'¹⁹ In institutions as much as in networks, the question is whether the processes of transmission, exchange and production are alive or not, whether they generate 'living' or 'dead' experience and culture, open pathways for new individuations or not.

¹⁸ See Negri, A. and Revel, J. (2010) *Comunismo/Instituciones de lo Comun*.

¹⁹ Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional de Rosario (2007), *Las Nuevas Condiciones de la Experiencia*, in: *Cuadernos de Campo no.2/2007*, published by Campo Grupal, Argentina. My translation from Spanish.

Common institutional experiments put different aspects of public institutions into question: their production of normativity, their homogenisation of ‘the social’, their instrumentality to the state. Rather than representing, common institutions are seen as expressive, as emerging from social struggles and operating a politics of flexibility and openness. This relates to the crisis of representation and welfare as well as to the phenomenon of dispersion in interesting ways. As Ingrassia says of the role of institutions in the context of dispersion:

The hegemony of financial capital and of the market operations it fosters brings with it the loss of the centrality of the state, the weakening of its function as meta-institutions articulating other institutional dispositifs. There’s a certain feeling of a crisis of meaning growing everywhere, of being adrift. Families, factories, schools, hospitals, prisons and other institutions keep existing. But what tends to increasingly erode is the general context of a primacy of stability which the metainstitutional articulation guaranteed.²⁰

How can alternative proposals for institution provide some stable points of reference within the context of dispersion, help map out coordinates for struggle and provide a continuous basis for relation, beyond the ‘dead’ labyrinths of state institutions (still perfectly Kafkaesque in their neoliberal manifestations, albeit inscribed in a culture of efficiency, management and aspiration rather than slow processing, ‘Verwaltung’ as in monotonous handling and sorting? The crisis of institutions is indeed no question of efficiencies, but one of ‘agencements’ (arrangements of desire and action, let’s say) and the re/production of subjectivity. The ‘expressive’ potential of institutions relates to their capacity to be sites for the re/production of subjectivity, in the sense of an active and caring collective production rather than a manufacturing, replicating or domesticating of subjectivity. Historical antecedents exist aplenty, as Pantxo says:

I think that expressive institutions have always been around. If you think about what a union, what a mutual support group or network was about in the 19th century, you’re talking about an expressive institution, a form of organisation that expresses and tries to deal with some needs. What happened in 2011 is that

²⁰ Fernandez-Savater, A. (2010/11), *Pensar (en) la dispersion*. p.148

we started to see and think about many things, not in this way... and we started to see and talk about this gap between a representative institution and an expressive institution.²¹

The challenges of thinking such expressive institutions have clearly shifted with the technological revolutions and transformations of labour and politics, key challenges concern the ways institutions can connect to networks, Sguigla asks:

[...] based on what kinds of dispositives should such an institution articulate itself? [...] Dispositifs that stimulate experimentation and collaborative culture based in the ‘procomun’ [‘pro-common’]. Cultural resources [equipamentos] and spaces dedicated to free culture [creacion libre] and to the best of amateur spirits. This is where the necessity to open doors with dignified resources to invisible creators/producers [creadores invisibles] and to stimulate the creation of collaborative networks based in a pedagogy that is centered around the importance of the procommons and open licencing.²²

The ‘creadores invisibles’ is such a collaborative network, operating at Casa Invisible to produce movement-based media and culture. The allusion to invisibility here points both to the invisibility of feminised and undocumented labour and to the becoming-anonymous of cultural production via the web, replacing the figure of the artist with the everyday creativity shaping processes of organisation.

Related experiments abound in the context of crisis. Whether it is the formation of self-organised agencies such as the ‘Oficina Precaria’²³ in Madrid and Sevilla, which functions as legal advice bureaus around labour rights, as consultancies for setting up cooperatives and as platforms for collective action, points in this direction. This model emerged before the 15M in Spain erupted, started by students facing their dire employment chances in crisis-ridden Spain. It appears promising since it articulates a struggle around work and conditions within current capitalism with the creation of new conditions and forms of work through promoting cooperatives and social movement.

²¹ Interview with Pantxo.

²² Sguigla, Nicolas (2011), *La Casa Invisible*

²³ See Oficina Precaria.

Struggles over space and continuous platforms in the neoliberal city (London)

Guy Standing, in his 2010 book on the precariat – published just as the student movement erupts in London – urges an invention of organisational forms that go beyond unions yet do incorporate institutional politics:

The precariat needs collective voice. The EuroMayDay movement is just a precursor, activities of primitive rebels preceding the emergence of collective action. Now is the time for bodies that represent the precariat on a continuing basis to bargain with employers, with intermediaries such as brokers and with government agencies most of all.²⁴

Speaking from the UK, Standing is possibly unaware of the institutional evolution of precarity-based struggles in Spain and Italy, but he intuits the historical moment for an emergence of new collective structures in the face of the crisis of work and social organisation. What follows are some notes on the manifestations of institutional dimensions in precarity-related movements in London.

It is difficult to hold communities together and build shared spaces within and across London. Decades of neoliberal policy have led to the privatization of public institutions and thus made access a matter of privilege; these early and brutal neoliberal policies also destroyed labour unions and brought about widespread precarity and working poverty; concomitant with real estate speculation, rising rents and gentrification processes continually displace people; the criminalization of squatting and increasing privatization of housing as well as public space close the city off to many; tight securitization and surveillance of space create a culture of fear and distrust; sprawling suburbs make the city extend across a very large area; and high transport costs make travel complicated. Those are some of the salient difficulties for constructing collective urban territories and transversal politics. As Nelly said in her interview, the attempts at building spaces for encounters consistently multiply in this city, yet they produce a sense of being overwhelmed and short of time-energy. Despite generous and sophisticated manoeuvres towards the construction of movement-based, open spaces, the reality is a tough one of high urban and social dispersion. The term ‘institutions’ rarely comes to be inferred in attempts at building spaces, perhaps because in this

²⁴ Standing, G. (2010), *The Precariat*. p. 167

advanced neoliberal space, it is reminiscent of efficiency-oriented and alienating ('tick-boxing', as Nelly puts it) forms of population management and profit maximisation, with most all but the NHS preserving an air of a universal public service (meanwhile under fierce attack by the Conservative government of Cameron).

Apart from consolidated efforts at setting up shared radical spaces legally, such as the recent project of a space run between the Precarious Workers Brigade, the sex worker collective X:talk, a feminist group and some anarchist legal support groups amongst others²⁵, most shared movement spaces in London are either short-term squats or universities. The occupations occurring within the UK student, anti-austerity and Occupy movements after 2010²⁶ have provided important, however very precarious and short-lived spaces of assembly and exchange. The UK student movement set a rhythm of intense mobilisations and pop-up squat spaces, continuing variously across anti-austerity and Occupy mobilisations. Spaces of high creativity and intense activity (learning, exchange, planning, production of political graphics, objects and information), however characterized by the same sense of quick and random connection and disconnection that has been described in relation to the speed and opportunism of networks earlier.

The tension between the excitement of large temporary gatherings and the desire to build sustained and situated practices makes itself felt here, nourished by the particular difficulty of constructing lasting territories and alliances in London. This is also due to it being a global city whose population rapidly shifts, with people moving in and out at fast pace, and where the precarization of work combines with a financially, logistically and spatially increasingly inaccessible urban landscape. Great joy lies in gathering across these limitations, yet the aspect of continuity often seems missing, as notes from a debrief about the student movement (organised by the nanopolitics group in December 2010) address in relation to the instituent dimension of the student uprisings:

²⁵ This space is under construction as I finish this thesis: it has no name yet but its rented location in Bethnal Green is assured.

²⁶ There have been a series of central London 'Really Really Free School' occupations of large buildings, lasting from several weeks up to a few months, wherein workshops, meetings and parties were held; the strategic occupation of large spaces for preparing strikes and demonstrations, such as the 'Cuts Café' of 2012, an old pub hosting workshops and meetings over the duration of two weeks; or indeed the Occupy camp outside Saint Pauls, lasting almost half a year and hosting a variety of infrastructures and activities such as a peoples kitchen, university space ('tent city university'), tent accommodation, assemblies of all sorts, as well as concerts, talks and parties.

If you're not an activist, how do you relate to what happened? [...] who am I in this, if not part of any institution [university notably]? [...] how can these recent events inform (micro/local) practices of groups, as a more sustainable mode of struggling/engaging that goes beyond the state of emergency/exception status of these weeks? [...] how to include others/ spread protest? How to take the city?²⁷

Universities and public (and public-private) institutions such as museums and libraries are important spaces of continuous practice in London. The UK groups at stake here have developed great skills in using spaces and resources of public as well as private institutions for the purpose of political reflection and organising²⁸. In the neoliberal city and in the crisis, institutions function as spaces of refuge and aggregated struggle, in view of constructing autonomous forms of organisation (such as setting up spaces, cooperatives, political organisations).

Organising (collective) life: an ethics and politics of care

Out of the crisis, new imaginaries around the macropolitical perspective of reproduction come to articulate themselves alongside (and often with) micropolitical perspectives on care. Recent movements of contestation and occupation have combined discussions around other kinds of political or economic system with other ways of giving attention and building collective space. As Fatimatta remembers of the 15M:

The inaugural moment of the 15th May movement, which was the occupation of squares – that was plain life... because there was from nurseries to infirmaries – it was a city, and so there were different people taking care of different aspects of the city.²⁹

When a movement becomes a city, inventing its own laws [auto-nomia], micro-institutions and cultures as well as ethics of care [dealing with heteronomy], it becomes a considerable threat to dominant governing systems. Autonomous reproduction is to do with the city as a tissue and territory that binds and connects, a space that allows for dwellings and movements beyond the prescribed paths of work, consumption and

²⁷ Notes from the session 'Debrief on recent weeks of struggle, facilitated by the Nanopolitics group in late 2010 - partly published in: Nanopolitics group (2013) *Some notes and reflections from Nanopolitics sessions* in: Nanopolitics Handbook.

²⁸ Goldsmiths College, SOAS, Queen Mary University and private arts spaces such as the Centre for Possible Studies and no.w.here are important examples.

²⁹ Interview with Fatimatta.

migration. Shared social spaces make the organisation of relations as well as survival possible, and as such not only lasting institutional experiments or short-term occupations, but also homes function as points of aggregation and continuity. Nizaia from the Schizoanalysis group in Barcelona suggests a process of sharing resources and skills across a collectivity: speaking from the point of view of her desirable future [in October 2011], she narrates a process of collective becoming around matters of everyday life and care:

Already since 2010, we had started thinking – coming back to this thing about income – about how to generate collective income, how to think about that, and so on... and with much uncertainty... and from there some ideas generated themselves, and the first thing we realised was that we needed to make an *inventory* of what the goods we could count on would be. And there were people where we realised that the assets [bienes] they had was a house for instance. I knew a few people who for one reason or another had a guaranteed home. Then other people, what we had was some jobs with stable contracts, which at least provided us a fixed and stable income for the first years. Then there were others who had time, because they were unemployed and so on. And so there was a moment... it was a moment of a very strong crisis. After 2012, when the cuts were much more nasty and when there were people who got into a very critical situation, we realised that either we do something or everything would go... we'd fall apart. And so we opted – in a small group first – for sharing incomes, and then that what each of us had available. Those who had time, for a period, came to make these con..[cut off: contracts] – exactly this *pact*, that they would take care more of things to do with reproduction, those who could cook, and so on, what they could bring... we learned with time. And in the beginning that was also problematic – this question of ‘whoever has time can take charge of reproductive tasks’ is to go back to past models..! And it took a lot out of us to resolve this, we were very lost. Because of course, whoever had work, well what they did was work; then these were roles that were no longer divided according to being a woman or man, because there were also men who had time and took on cooking, but still it repeated that the one who had the money and the job was out working and so on, and brought the money, and whoever didn't, took care of these labours that traditionally were much more undervalued. And...it was a

challenge.³⁰

Nizaia imagines putting resources back in common in order to allow for everyday lives and solidarities beyond the competitiveness of the neoliberal metropolis, the loneliness of migration-mobility and networked life, and isolation within the nuclear family. Undoing an individualized logic of exchange within a constellation of shared everyday care and work is an important part of such a project: proposing more fluid and longer terms of exchange, valorizing things and acts beyond just money, understanding contribution in multiple terms, applying trust and generosity to relations. Attention, time, endurance and skills constitute some of the axes of valorisation across which such economies of gifts, barter and compromise may play out.

As Deleuze and Guattari point out in the *Anti-Oedipus*³¹, and more recently David Graeber in his book on *Debt*³², it is often the logic of the gift (as opposed to the logic of immediate exchange as transactions) that holds communal relations together through its forging of longer-term circuits of reciprocity/exchange, trust and appreciation. In his anthropological-historical study, Graeber points out that direct exchange is mostly used between enemy tribes or clans where there is no friendliness or trust to mediate longer terms of relations. It is the gift that marks friendly relations of exchange and sharing within communities (not larger societies, where these dealings become more abstract and require a mediating term such as money), and the proposal of Nizaia points to such longer term modes of trusting economy.

Not an economy beyond measure or rules, since that might lead to similar modes of mystification and exploitation as is the case with labours of love and care, often framed as gifts despite the power relations underlying them. Indeed gift economies are akin to those of debt, all but devoid of power relations but spaces wherein which relational terms are negotiated based on a supposition of trust. Where there is no such trust, there needs to be a law to assure everyone's rights – the trick of caring power (as in its pastoral or neo-communitarian manifestations) is precisely to render its subjects unable or unwilling to claim rights by placing a veil of goodwill on the matter and relation at

³⁰ Interview with Nizaia.

³¹ Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2000[1977]) *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp.185-187

³² Graeber, D. (2011) *Debt: the first 5000 years*. *The Myth of Barter*, New York: Melville House. pp.21-43

stake. This is why struggles for micro-worlds that undo neoliberal individualisation and build new subjectivities and economic circuits must go hand in hand with struggles for constitutional and social rights.

The negotiation between the urgencies of macro-militancy and of inventing sustainable ways of living and collaborating is a concern shared by all my interviewees. Speaking from the viewpoint of her desirable future, Anja points to the ways in which neoliberal entrepreneurialism can come to invest collective projects, making for proliferations of groups and projects that often produce little subjective or political effect:

There was a big fad at the time around the word ‘cooperative’. And while that fad has kind of passed, I think some of the principles are remaining – and one of the big things that has changed is our understanding of necessity, so: why do we actually do something? Like, how does it pertain to our everyday lives, how urgent is it for us actually? And the problem was that a lot of people were doing things that had no real urgency for them, but we fabricated this urgency about them, you know. And on some level it did feel urgent – but I think that’s what led to so much sickness: we were very naïve in our understandings of what was actually necessary to us, what was actually urgent. And I think that we were also encouraged to flit about the place, to kind of overextend ourselves, because if you weren’t overextending yourself then you weren’t being productive and you weren’t involved. So a lot of the stuff that is now came out of our understanding of what we need to be involved in, what is actually urgent: and of course things like food, shelter, fresh water, air, that’s one level of need. But there are so many other levels as well: like our capacity to articulate our creativity, sexual and intimate desires and things like that.³³

Collective processes can address many different levels of need and desire, and indeed they need not always be framed as groups or projects to be effective and produce worlds of their own. The figure of the network can help take informal processes seriously, and help valorise the pertinence and strength of relations that exist outside of more formal collectivity. My proposal of valorising care networks here proposes to reach across these levels, building on fairly invisible processes of organisation and sharing that come

³³ Interview with Anja.

to reflect on themselves, without as such turning into projects or formal entities necessarily. They need to relate to struggles on structural levels however, since only broad political changes make other economies sustainable and expandable, with relevant rights and institutions in place, as well as ways of designing space that enable autonomous modes of collectivity. Beyond the nuclear family home and the privatisation and enclosure of space, this requires new ways of creating and using homes, streets, squares and buildings, as well as new rights and institutions and new micropolitics of relation.

The loss of ground for opportunity and aspiration that most people experience in the European territory at present brings with it the slight relief of meeting others anew, of being forced out of the isolation of the home, hearth and job to find ways to make ends meet with others, finding new (as well as rediscovering old) forms of struggle.³⁴ The combination of precarity and a newfound wealth of social relations and collective spaces produces new challenges not just for organisation and politics but also for an ethics of being together. As the Spanish feminists blogging on 'Vidas Precarias' say in the context of crisis:

In the productive tension of this crash, some fundamental questions arise: How do we want to live together? What is the meaning of the common today? How can we constitute it without forgetting that it is not just a political and organisational but also a subjective and ethical question that's at stake? To be sure, we want to ask which is the life we consider worth being lived, cared for, sustained, desired, rescued.³⁵

With little respect for life or communities, the so-called 'rescue operations' of the ECB, IMF and EC are plunging southern and marginal European countries into spirals of debt, creating long lasting ties of dependency hardly desired by the populations they affect. The bitter gifts of bailout and rescue that are being handed out across the European Union today show that discourses of brother- or sisterliness can be meaningless if structural issues (in this case, global capitalism) are not addressed. While debt in the minor sense can build on relations of trust via reciprocal gifts, it can also be

³⁴ Initiatives around urban commons, communal gardening, food cooperatives and community supported agriculture are emerging en masse across crisis-ridden Europe, for example.

³⁵ Vidas Precarias (2013) *Interrogando la Crisis*.

used in a major way as blackmail. It is perhaps not by chance that in the moment of crisis in the European south, care comes to be taken with a pinch of salt, and the question of social and constitutional rights (and of ‘respect’, as the 15M commissions put it) comes to provide some counterbalance for social movement practices. Neo-communitarian contexts too see new critical and resistance cultures emerge, producing tools to question and analyse ‘care’ in different manifestations. Just as tools for demystifying ‘creativity’ have been important for undoing neoliberal subjectivation processes (making ‘care’ and important counterweight), the differentiations and affirmations emerging around care will likely be key building blocks for the politics of the coming years.

Written in the context of economic, social and reproductive crisis, this chapter as well as the thesis it sits within has investigated relations between autonomy and heteronomy in order to articulate a feminist-autonomist politics that can address questions of precarity/subalternity, social reproduction/care, mobility/migration and creativity/invention. The tensions and affinities across each of these pairs has informed my arguments and reflections, as I have sought to explore how practices and imaginaries construct new commons across those pairs and this list. In this last chapter, a series of questionings of autonomous reproduction, taking its impulses mainly from Spanish social movements, has led us to see the importance of organisational forms such as the institution of the commons, the cooperative and the network. These concerns compose with those about the organisational forms of the family, the care chain and care network, which hold projects of self-organisation together.

We have seen that the harnessing of continuities and spaces of autonomous care and reproduction are key to challenging neoliberal capitalism, and have explored some of the complications this implies based on new paradigms of accumulation via free labour and community. In examining resistant practices, concepts and imaginaries emerging in relation to the captures that neoliberal surplus production implies, I have passed through attempts at articulating new micropolitical stakes.

I have attempted to map out some specific ways in which neoliberalism and neo-communitarianism capture work, time and energy, affect and care, movement and

flexibility, and association and organization – always with particular inflexions in terms of gender, race, class and so forth.

To this list of captures I have counterpoised accounts of liberations and subversions, challenging capital and building the bases of resistance and other worlds: commoning and passionate work, cultures of attention and care (outdoing the pressures of efficiency and performance), forms of solidarity and friendship (blowing open opportunistic as well as conservative notions of belonging), practices of movement and mobility (operating forces of connection and care against all odds of dispersion), forms of self-organisation and self-governance that invent strong platforms for autonomy and reproduction/care.

Those struggles, rooted in the everyday and singularities of relations, as well as in potentials and embodiments of creativity and care, are far more than reactive. They are struggles around interdependency as much as autonomy, seeking to invent new ways of thinking and feeling across the intimate and the global, against the grain of accumulation. Beyond the perspectives of universal change and total escape, they address problems along singular and local lines, while at the same time following the collectively and globally traced fault lines, terms and tensions at stake here. It's through common articulations and inventions as much as ties of care and affection that the struggles I tell of here shape 'we's' – 'we's' that are more than a sum of parts, a marker of identity or a random assemblage.

Each instance told of here passes through the production of a fleeting but precious 'we'. And perhaps this world of creating the common and co-individuating is not the 'other' world after all, outside of the sphere of 'real' work, belonging or organisation. Its practices and experiences on the contrary ground a sense of 'home' that has always been the departure point for relating: the pre-individual possibility of a 'we', the capacity to connect and relate beyond given formulas, that energy and joyful density of being with others.

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Agora 99, Madrid/ES
www.agora99.cc

AZien – Agencia de Asuntos Precarios, Madrid/ES
<http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/spip.php?article74>

‘Boycott Workfare’ Campaign, London/UK
<http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

Carrot Workers Collective, London/UK
<http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/>

La Casa Invisible, Malaga/ES
www.lainvisible.net

CounterCartographiesCollective (3Cs), North Carolina/US
<http://www.countercartographies.org/>

CounterMapping QMary, London/UK
<http://countermappingqmary.blogspot.co.at/>

Creadores Invisibles, Malaga/ES
<http://losinvisibles.wordpress.com/>

Laboratorio del Procomun, Rosario/AR
<http://procomunrosario.com.ar/>

Edu-Factory, EU-wide
<http://edu-factory.org/>

En Red, Madrid/ES
<http://enred.cc/>

La Eskalera Karakola, Madrid/ES
<http://www.sindominio.net/karakola>

EuroMayDay, EU-wide
<http://www.euromayday.org/>

European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, Vienna/AT
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Global Womens Strike, London/UK
<http://www.globalwomenstrike.net>

Grupo esquizo Barcelona/ES
<http://esquizarcelona.org/>

Feministas Nomadas, Malaga/ES
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Foro de Vida Independiente y Diversidad, Madrid/ES
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Fugas, Grupo de estudios micropolíticos, Malaga/ES
<http://fugasgrupodeestudios.wordpress.com/>

Future Archive, web platform.
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Globalproject, IT
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Grupo Esquizo, Barcelona/ES
<http://www.esquizarcelona.org/>

Gruppi d'Acquisto Solidale, IT
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Institute for Network Cultures, Amsterdam/NL
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Kulturometer, Madrid/ES
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Laboratorio de Analisis Institucional, Rosario/AR
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<http://procomunrosario.com.ar/>

Making a Living, London/UK
<http://www.criticalnetwork.co.uk/event.php?id=383>

Micropolitics Research Group, London/UK
<http://micropolitics.wordpress.com/about/>

Mute Magazine, London/UK
<http://www.metamute.org>

Nanopolitics Group, London/UK
<http://nanopolitics.noblogs.org>

Observatorio Metropolitano
<http://stupidcity.net/> Barcelona/ES
<http://www.observatoriometropolitano.org/> Madrid/ES

Oficina Precaria, Madrid/ES
<http://www.oficinaprecaria.net/>

Partido del Futuro, ES
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Precaria Blog, web platform.
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R:08 ,Madrid/ES
<http://www.r08.es/>

Radical Collective Care Practices Blog, Vienna/AT
<http://radicalcollectivecare.blogspot.com/>

Refugee Protest Camp Vienna, AT
<http://refugeecampvienna.noblogs.org/>

Reproduce This! Project, London/UK
<http://www.reproducethis.org/>

Serpica Naro, Milano/IT
<http://www.serpicanaro.com/>

Sounds of Movement Radio Show, Vienna/AT
<http://soundsofmovement.noblogs.org>

Stupidcity Blog, Barcelona/ES
<http://stupidcity.net/>

Territorio Domestico, Madrid/ES
<http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/spip.php?mot21>

The Sounds of Movement Radio Show, Vienna/AT
<https://soundsofmovement.noblogs.org/>

Universidad Nómada, ES
<http://www.universidadnomada.net/>

Territorio Domestico, Madrid/ES

<http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/spip.php?rubrique28>

Toma la Plaza, Madrid/ES
<http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net>

Wintercamp 2009, Institute for Network Cultures, Amsterdam/NL
<http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/wintercamp>

Yo sí, Sanidad Unviersal Campaign, Madrid/ES
<http://yosisanidaduniversal.net>

APPENDIXES

Appendix 0: List of Interviews

London participants

- Oscar – February 2011, London [not online]
- Nelly – 14th June 2011, London
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/57>
- Gabriella – 3rd July 2011, London [not online]
- Pantxo – 12th July 2011, London
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/55>
- Bue – June 2011, Rømø, DK [not online]
- Anja – 7th August 2011, Graz
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/56>

Spain participants

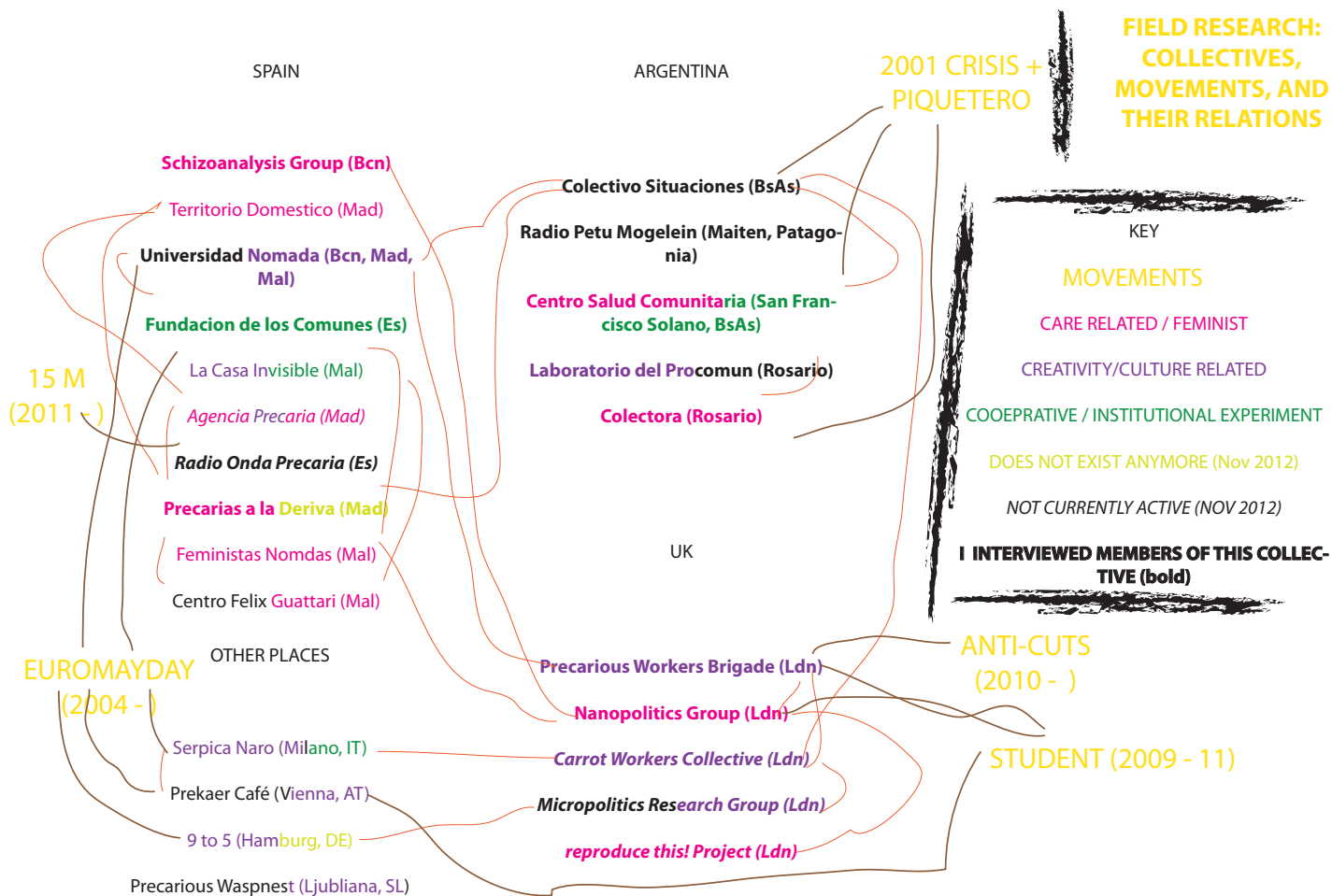
- Fatimatta – June 2011, London
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/54>
- Marga – October 2011, Madrid
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/59>
- Marisa – October 2011, Madrid
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/60>
- Nizaia – November 2011, Barcelona
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/61>
- Interview with Marcela, Nov 2012, Madrid.
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<http://www.malmoe.org/artikel/regieren/2507>

Argentina participants

- Centro de Salud Comunitaria- April 2011, Solano/Buenos Aires, AR
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/63>

- Colectora, Cooperativa de Intergrantes Terapeuticos – April 2011, Rosario, AR
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/62>
- Ratio Petu Mogeleiñ – April 2012, Maiten/Chubut, AR
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/64>
- Laboratorio del Procomun – April 2012, Rosario, AR
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/67>
- FaSinPat/Zanon – April 2012, Neuquen, AR
<http://futurearchive.org/movies/66>

Appendix 1: Diagram on Groups, their locations and links



Appendix 2: Timeline of some collective encounters

a selective timeline of collective encounters, formations and events (color-coded according to area of work, see key below)

2007		05 summit for non-aligned initiatives in education culture (05 carrot workers caucus)	06 counter G8 summit heiligendamm (summit)	spring/autumn - micropolitics group (active til 2010)
2008	02 the art of rent, london (seminar)		06 carrot workers collective (active til 2011)	
2009	03 wintercamp, amsterdam (camp)	04 sao paulo (research)	06 governance cultural, malaga (meeting)	09 militant research (micropolitics event) london
2010	01 nanopolitics group (active up to date)	02 -05 counter-mapping, london (project)	07 encuentro esquizoanalysis malaga (meeting)	11 commoniversity, barcelona (meeting)
			07 transit labour, shanghai (project)	08 institutions at the impasse: PWB, london (event+group formation)
				autumn- uk student movement
2011	02 micropolíticas, bcn+madrid (workshops)	03 PWB precarity tribunal (event)	05 - 15M movement	05 fundacion de los comunes (FdC), malaga, mtg
		04 institucion, transformacion, revolucion, madrid (meeting to constitute FdC)		spring - uk anti-cuts movements
2012	04/05 argentina (interviews)	07 plan de rescate ciudadano, barcelona (1st federal meeting)		10 nanopolitics screens guattari film
		spring - nanopolitics handbook (editing/writing)		

networks - movements - institutions

travel/research

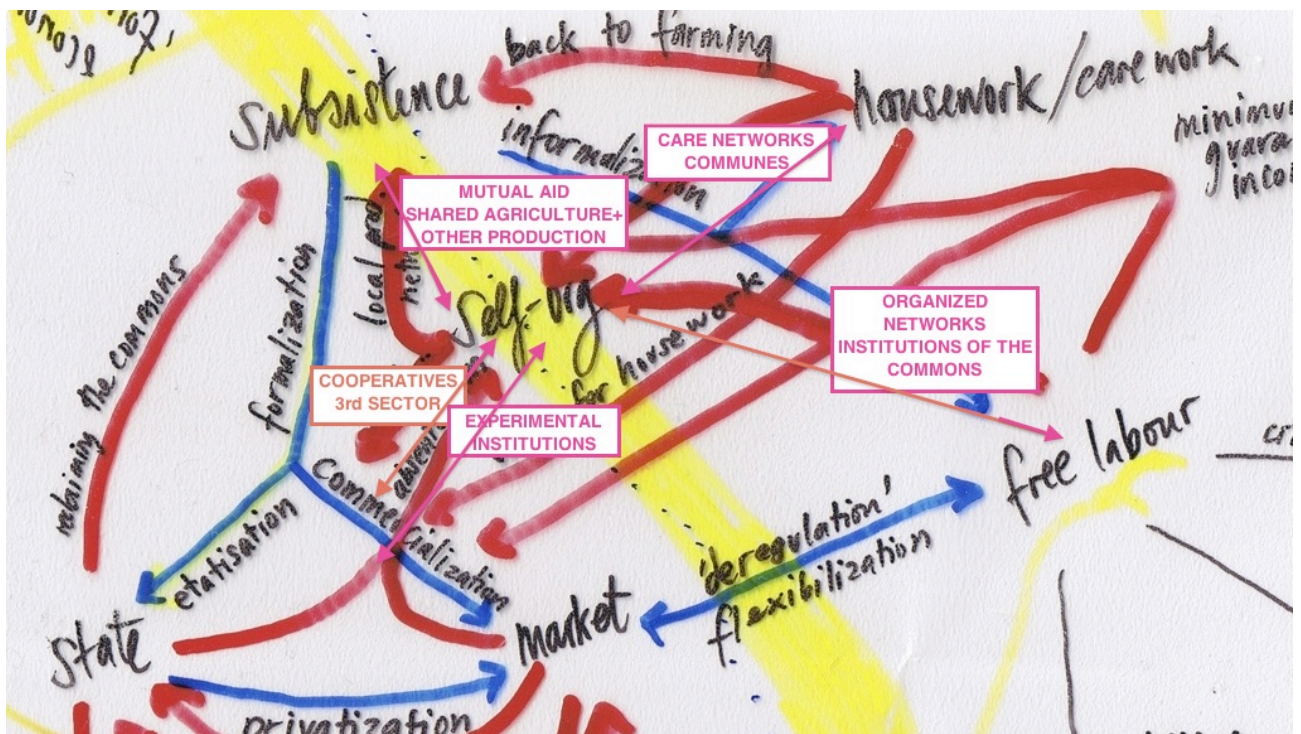
learning - knowledge

care - micropolitics

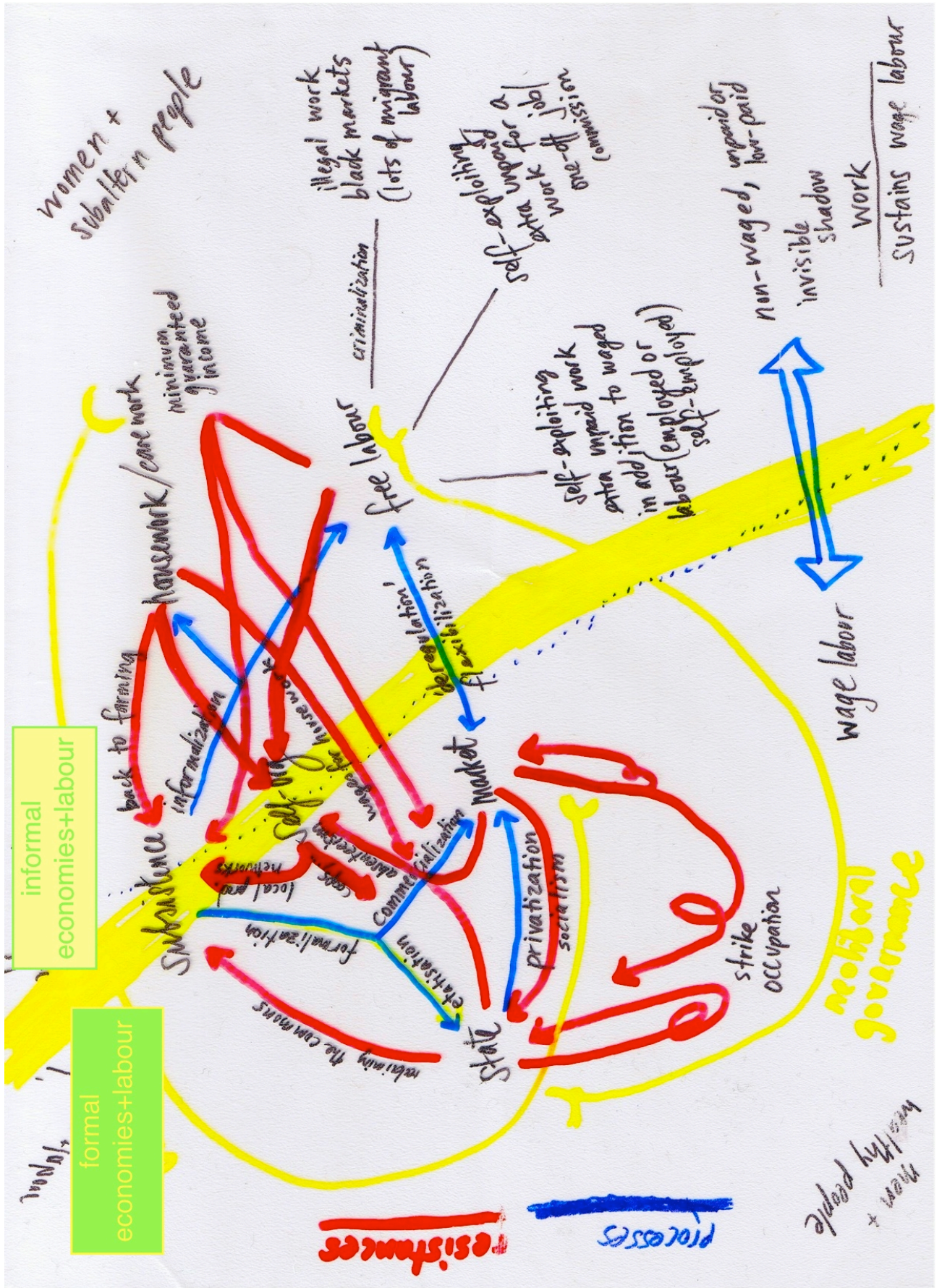
labour - precarity

Appendix 3: Diagram on Formal-Informal Work

Zoomed in:



Full diagram see next page.



Appendix 4: Terminological fields and politics

Throughout this thesis, the reader will come across a variety of terms that seem almost synonymous with each other: care, reproduction, the everyday, life, or creativity, invention, innovation and culture. And: collectivity, movement, network, family, group... terms that have their histories, their predominant usages and politics. Why not just settle on one vocabulary for clarity's sake, and stick with the unambiguous positioning this enables? For one, because this writing and its subject are marked by ambivalence, and to do this justice is to engage with its terms. Also, as practices invent their own concepts and usages with time, grasping certain processes implies engaging with shifts and ambivalences in language: since this thesis is written in and over time, various vocabularies and discursive moments are inscribed within it. While trying to speak from and to the present, it is clear to me that any text of this dimension cannot pretend at a temporally unique and spatially objective viewpoint. Hardly anyone's experience of cooking food at home is merely an experience of 'work', of 'reproduction', of 'life' or of 'care', for instance: it may be any of those at different moments. And cooking may also be an experience of hunger, of pleasure, of control, of love, of perversion, and so forth, depending on where, when and who cooks. The same goes for care and creative activity, to stick with those terms.

No orthodoxy is possible or desirable in trying to grapple with these questions around care and creativity, which offer various approaches and vocabularies: as I go along, I map out some possible conceptual choices and politics. One key term that connects and at the same time complicates all I speak about is 'work': the question of what to call work not only sets up – and upsets – many of my reflections here, but also resonates and returns across much of what follows. Disentangling some of the concepts at stake here is an exercise that helps map out a field of histories and usages as well as resonances and tensions. As such, the brief exploration of a vocabulary around creativity, care and collectivity below helps clarify some of the context and stakes of this investigation.

It is important to note the different language contexts I draw on here: the term 'militancy' has its Spanish and Italian roots, the term 'care' is as complex and multi-referential only in English, the distinction between 'work' and 'labour' doesn't quite

exist in German (perhaps part of the reason why I am not drawn to it, since German is my first language), the French ‘rapport’ and ‘relation’ can’t be rendered easily in English, and so forth. This politics of mixing and making ‘transversal’ connections risks being confusing and alienating sometimes, however I have preferred translation and the contamination, invention and poetry it implies over a more static or pure vocabulary.

Care-reproduction-everyday-life

How to render, for example, the differences between a politics of speaking of ‘care’, vs. ‘reproduction’, vs. the ‘everyday’, vs. speaking simply of ‘life’? These all address different aspects of one field of experiences and practices, but they also each come with their histories, contexts and politics.

‘Care’ is the most recurrent term here. This is because it can refer both to work practices and everyday practices, by itself allowing for a certain complexity of addressing experience. At least two acceptations of care can be pointed out: care as attitude (to care ‘about’ or ‘for’) and care as work (care giving). In either way, care is a term that most people have some associations with, and as such discourses of care have more popular appeal. ‘Care’ has a history of Christian use, close to the concept of charity and thus often implying altruism or gratuity. With these latter undertones, it can also be found in contemporary mainstream political discourses from left to right, standing in for a moral and humanist dimension that many perceive as missing in neoliberalism. As such, the term does not necessarily imply an analysis of capitalist exploitation and women’s work.

‘Reproduction’ is my second term of choice, clear in its Marxist origins and its counterpoint to capitalist production. Like ‘care’, it points specifically to women’s histories, but with the added benefit of also pointing to questions of capitalist accumulation. Reproduction is a highly political term, running much less of a risk to be co-opted by a politics of benevolence, yet to some extent it also fails to point beyond ‘productive’ labour. Reproduction remains a term that is oppositional (and secondary) to production: as such it is key to analysis of past and contemporary work and industry, but not sufficient either. Being a more theoretical term, its use is also somewhat restricted to people who come in contact with Marxist thought.

The ‘everyday’ is another important term here, echoing a situationist sensitivity to the invisible things that happen around us all the time, constructing our world not just materially but also relationally and musically – composing it. This term has the capacity to address the desiring, poetic and unexpected dimensions of lives, yet despite its uptake in anarchist culture, it remains somewhat tied to the bourgeois-artistic context it emerges from. In much anarchist literature, to speak of the ‘everyday’ is to invert the predominant valorisation of work, exposing daily life as a space of doing and making that exceeds the segmented sociability of wage work, and that as such opens onto imagining other worlds of valorisation. As such it contributes a sensitivity to the relation between creativity and care, but doesn’t as such imply a feminist analysis for instance.

‘Life’, finally, is the perhaps most abstract term in this series, employed in a myriad of ways across different discursive contexts. The notion of ‘life’ I mostly draw upon here stems from Foucault’s theorizations of bio-politics, and successive theorizations of neoliberalism, where life remains abstract precisely because of the way statistical-regulatory politics makes it into an object of governance. An interesting, albeit confusing, dissonance emerges in thinking such ‘life’ alongside ‘everyday life’, showing a certain incompatibility of perspectives and uses of the term, pointing to different dimensions of experience. The situationist and feminist politics of everyday life provide dispositifs not just for critical analysis but also for differential action with regards to life.

What can be said about this broad field of experiences and practices then, lying between care-reproduction-everyday and life? I am enquiring into social movement contexts where Feminism and Autonomism meet to constitute practices of organisation that are sensitive to the terms in the list above. The practices I speak about, like all practices, exist between worlds and conventions, have multiple conceptual referents, betray any single perspective. These contemporary militant practices oscillate between the mentioned terms in their self-descriptions (whether those are articulated by individuals or collectives), and so does my writing. It is the contemporary complexity of care-reproduction-everyday-life that is at stake, and its terms are employed accordingly, differing across chapters. For instance, in speaking about work, it’s mostly ‘reproduction’ and ‘care’ that I dwell on, where in speaking about networks and

collective experience it's often the 'everyday', 'life' and 'care' that resonate. And then there are moments of deliberate mix-up, experimenting the possibility of having new senses and meanings emerge.

Creativity-invention-innovation-culture

What are the politics of speaking of 'creativity' vs. 'invention' vs. 'innovation' vs. 'culture' in the context of contemporary social movement practices and economic crisis, then? Those again all address different aspects of experience and practice, some of which I only touch upon ever so briefly. I mostly refer to 'creativity' in this thesis, in reference to those 'cultural industries' that became the 'innovative' 'creative industries' in the 1990s and that shaped many of the lives, work and politics of people involved in the EuroMayDay movement, as well as in reference to the Zapatista-style ethics of collective invention and creation that also resonated in some of the Global Social Movement. Time and again, in varying ways, the register of care-reproduction-everyday-life comes into my arguments to complicate the notions of creativity, innovation and culture in the industrial and commercialised sense. The tensions between different acceptations of care and creativity run across all chapters here.

Creativity.

'Creativity' can have a similarly Christian connotation as care, echoing ideas of divine creation. In the separation of art from the church, artistic creativity has seen an embodiment in the individual genius, predominant figure of the artist still today. Building on the figure of the liberal creative individual in possession of 'talent' and entrepreneurial spirit, 'creativity' is a term that has been heavily used to promote neoliberal ideologies around speculative profit generation more recently, often coupled with the term 'innovation', and made policy through the creative industries. In this usage, 'creativity' equals the capacity to produce newness (beyond moral judgement) and is essentially individual.

These are resonances I cannot avoid in using this term, however my writing shifts its meaning again in reference to social movements, grassroots and everyday uses. Zapatista affirmations of multiplicity¹, the Italian movements of 77 and their use of

¹ See for instance Cambio de Michoacan (2008), 'Zapatismo y Altermundialismo: Imaginacion y Creatividad', published at <http://www.cambiodemichoacan.com.mx/editorial.php?id=120>

invention, the movement of movements and its affirmation of creating other worlds, the MayDay movements and their use of creative tactics, and so many more instances: ‘resistir es crear’ [to resist is to create] is one of the contemporary slogans that speak of this in the Spanish language context. All these uses insist on creativity as something collective and transformative, despite its investments by religion and capital. This is a form of epistemological resistance I embrace here, while moving towards infusing notions of creativity with those of care and a more feminist politics. ‘To resist is to create and to create is to resist’ as the name of a group of creative workers in the 15M movement in Spain goes: my argument here adds that ‘to care is to create and to create is to care’, including the dimension of longer term and everyday struggle into the lexicon of resistance, as many in the 15M movement do.

Invention.

‘Invention’ is a term no less problematic than ‘creativity’ for its association with scientific genius (mostly male) and of spontaneous illumination that occurs mostly under isolated, laboratory like conditions. The question of invention then, as in the Simondon quote in my Introduction, in the case of this thesis, concerns the capacity to collectively imagine, build and sustain other ways of living, working and relating – going beyond the ‘blockage’ of capitalism and crisis so to speak.

Culture.

‘Culture’ is another complicated term with a big history: as Raymond Williams shows in some of his writings², it’s ‘one of the two or three most complicated terms in the English language’³. I will only point to William’s way of tracing the religious to humanistic uses of this word across time, and stick with some more relevant contemporary references around it. Felix Guattari says in the French 1980s that culture is a reactionary concept, conflating multitudinous practices into one homogeneous, static and ethnocentric vision of ‘how one does things’ in a certain place⁴. This use of the word has now gone out fashion, with more nuanced anthropological turns in research and art where ‘culture’ often refers to a singular instance of practice rather than a one-dimensional model.

² See Williams, R. (1988). Keywords : a vocabulary of culture and society. London, Fontana Press. p.87

³ Ibid.

⁴ Guattari, F. (2009) *Culture: a reactionary concept*. In: Guattari, F., S. Rolnik, et al. (2009). Molecular Revolution in Brasil.

From the humanistic idea of culture as unitary and related to civilization, to self-invented and self-sustained practices that shift constantly: in this project, the call for a ‘culture of precedents’ as a way of producing memory and transmitting practices within social movements⁵ resonates. As does the investigation of ‘network cultures’, introduced by a synonymous institute, as a field of social ‘innovation’, to put it into the terms of marketing, or of collective invention of practices and protocols of relating. A culture may thus be an auto-poietic and intelligent system of reference and practice, aware of its precedents and imagining its futures, without necessarily domesticating itself to a point of rigid institutionalism. Taken as situated, self-generative and changing, ‘culture’ points towards a perspective on sustainability that may be important to my project of investigating militancy, as it refers to the production, circulation and transmission of knowledge and practice – however I often prefer to speak of collectivity and creativity or invention, to avoid certain humanistic undertones.

Innovation.

‘Innovation’ comes last in this chain of terms, and seems most problematic since it is not just tied to the Creative Industries, Science and Business where it *grosso modo* refers to anything that can be capitalised on, directly or indirectly, mostly via use of copyright – meaning the extraction of something from the commons towards its transplantation into the world of products and commerce. Innovation in most cases points to primitive accumulation. It reflects a certain affirmation of ‘the new’ that I view very critically here: neoliberalism is all about affirmations of constant renewal – rather than recycling or maintaining, for instance – of ideas, things and practices that become products or services to be sold. In my understanding, newness in the sense of a Badouian event is extremely rare and has nothing whatsoever to do with capitalist manufacture or regeneration, hence I mostly avoid this term.

Yet it’s also precisely in the neoliberal context that it becomes urgent to reclaim some of those terms. During the high years of recent speculative cultures, from the late 90s onwards, we have seen many attempts at reclaiming and subverting what I call creativity here. Those have not yielded huge success perhaps, leaving this range of concepts in the hands of capital, where it developed towards a situation of deep crisis

⁵ See Vercauteren, David (2007) *Micropolitique des groups*.

caused by excessive speculation, renewal and primitive accumulation. I think that now [2012, at the time of writing] is not so much a moment to insist on creativity in its renewing dimensions but rather to reinvent practices of care, to learn again what makes cultures sustainable and open. Hence the ‘creativity’ spectrum is more of a haunting presence in my PhD, echoing struggles recently defeated and yet inevitably in the remaking, as practices of play and collective invention.

Speaking across

To speak across the registers of care and creativity poses two main challenges in the neoliberal context: how to escape the poisonous logics of charity and of individualism. This is why the collective dimension becomes a main focus of investigation here: how and when do collective or associative processes transcend those logics? The neoliberal network offers a protocol of atomized nodality, easy disconnection, instrumental association and distributed competitiveness; the protocol of governmental cooperativism operates a principle of exploiting free labour under the aegis of volunteerism and community. I explore the network logic in Section B, and the world of manufactured civil society in Section C – in relation to the challenges they pose to movements. Collective invention or non-manufactured collective events require a sensitivity to process that is neither predominant in feminist nor Autonomist movements per se, nor in other mainstream political cultures left or right necessarily.

Creativity and care here take another importance, as those spheres of life, or those kinds of experiences where such other sensitivities can be practiced: struggles to be invented, to be opened unto. Many such struggles are ‘other’ not just to biopolitical views of life (as countable, statistical, biological) but also to ‘work’ as what is considered and paid as work in capitalism, assigned a specific place and value in the world of exchange. Indeed this is where the strength of caring and creative activity lies: where collective processes access the ways in which these activities lie beyond measure that the most promising self-organising processes become possible. Where new meanings and valorisations can be invented *and* sustained, by virtue of understanding both the immeasurability (in nominal terms) *and* the value (in vital terms) of care and creativity. Questions of collectivity inevitably intertwine with those of subjectivity.

Collectivity – movement – group – network - family

The dimension of the collective has its own plethora of terms: there are five of them that have specific pertinence to this project, because of their genealogies and contemporary usages.

Collectivity.

Collectivity here functions as the umbrella term under which questions of association get discussed. Simondon thinks the becoming of a collective as process that is closely tied to psychic individuation, and as such proceeds through tensions and resonances. The problem of collectivity, as the problem of how we come and remain together, how we assemble and disperse, how we belong, identify and converge, is a problem of subjectivity as much as of organisation. As Muriel Combes points out, for Simondon it's a matter of Collective and Psychic Individuation – in the singular, linked by an 'and'⁶. Collectivity as inseparable from the psychic, never just a matter of givens, of formal membership or statistical, spatial or linguistic proximity. In sections B and C, as well as in my methodological chapter (1.2), I speak of ways of imagining and acting upon association, and explore the implications of thinking collectivity and subjectivity in relation to networks and chains. With care as with creativity, the Simondonian framework operates as a *disposition* rather than as *dispositif* in this thesis, leading me to draw on questions of relation.

Movements.

Those considerations have large implications for how to imagine movements, too. 'Movement' is another very abstract term which corresponds very well with the notion of auto-poietic collectivity that I am describing, if we understand movements as based in moment of convergence of imaginaries and actions, and a search for orientation, rather than as formally delimited and centrally coordinated politics. In an interview for a film about the Brazilian Landless Peoples Movement (MST)⁷, a young woman says that 'we are a social movement, not a political movement'. While I do not see a division between the social and politics in those terms, it is true that my research takes inspiration from many Latin American movements in their ethics of wanting to build

⁶ See Combes, M. Simondon. Individu et Collectivite: La relation transindividuelle. PUF: Paris. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19437552/Muriel-Combes-Simondon-individu-et-collectivite>, p.21

⁷ Alemi, M. [director] (2006) 'History did not end', Documentary, Brasil. Portuguese/Italian with english subtitles. Online at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6699809913287688781> (The quote can be found around 24 Minutes into the Video)

power in themselves⁸ rather than to take over power (as in representative democracy). This relation of movement to power is key: whether and how to take power, and whether to conceive of power in terms of dominance, cooperation or spiritedness? The Autonomist-feminist practices I investigate here point towards the construction of self-organised infrastructures and practices more than they try to lay claim on parliamentary politics or focus on campaigning or lobbying. It is in this dimension of creating and looking after themselves as movements that I am interested, in the spirit of what Silvia Federici names a need for self sustaining movements⁹. The movements that I refer to have no official representatives but rather gain strength from building a culture of precedents around their practices: and as the name indicates, they permanently change in form and intensity.

Groups.

This thesis also points to ‘groups’, since much of the thought on micropolitics and collective practice stems from experiences and writings of groups or collectives. To some extent, this thesis transposes theories of in-groups and out-groups from social psychology¹⁰ onto theories of networks, questioning how we see different collective instances relate and how we conceive of our own position in relation to them. Instead of affirming a politics of membership and insisting on case studies limited to specific groups, I have chosen to cut across different group experiences in my interviews and research. The locus of my questioning of in/out-sider experiences again builds more on the functions of creativity and care within a collective context, since it seems to me that different modalities of caring and creative relations provide fertile – and less sociologically determined – grounds upon which to investigate the coming-together of subjectivity and collectivity.

Network.

‘Network’ is a recurrent concept in this thesis, not just as an object of research here but

⁸ The Zapatistas are known for their ethics of going slow and building power through cooperation rather than through representation, as are John Holloway’s theses on ‘changing the world without taking power’. I primarily refer to Starhawk in my discussion of different kinds of power.

⁹ Federici, Silvia (2006): ‘Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint’, lecture at Bluestockings Radical Bookstore in New York City, October 28th 2006, available online at <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarius-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>

¹⁰ I draw particularly on Gilbert Simondon’s way of taking up these theories. Simondon, G. and J. Garelli (2005). *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information* préface de Jacques Garelli. Grenoble, Millon.

also a methodology of sorts, as I explain in a section called ‘writing the network, being written by the network’ (chapter 1.2). This concerns the way the text is woven with many cross references between passages, held together via conceptual and narrative nodes through which the linear text spins time and again. This question of methodology is as much about subjectivity as it is about form however: how to imagine one’s position vis-a-vis ones network/s? Can we see ourselves as being able to step outside networks and grasp them as wholes, in the way we may do with other organisational forms? The network and the movement have a certain immanence and autopoeisis in common – as a man says in the film on the Brazilian Landless People’s Movement says: ‘I’ve been told the movement was here... as if the movement were an object! Actually the movement isn’t an object, it’s a people without land... Sometimes my friends ask: “Jamil, are you in the Landless Workers Movement?” And I answer “I’m not in the movement, I am the movement.”’¹¹ The network presents a similar subjectivity, and correspondingly necessitates ways of relating to it that go beyond identification with clear roles, structures and forms.

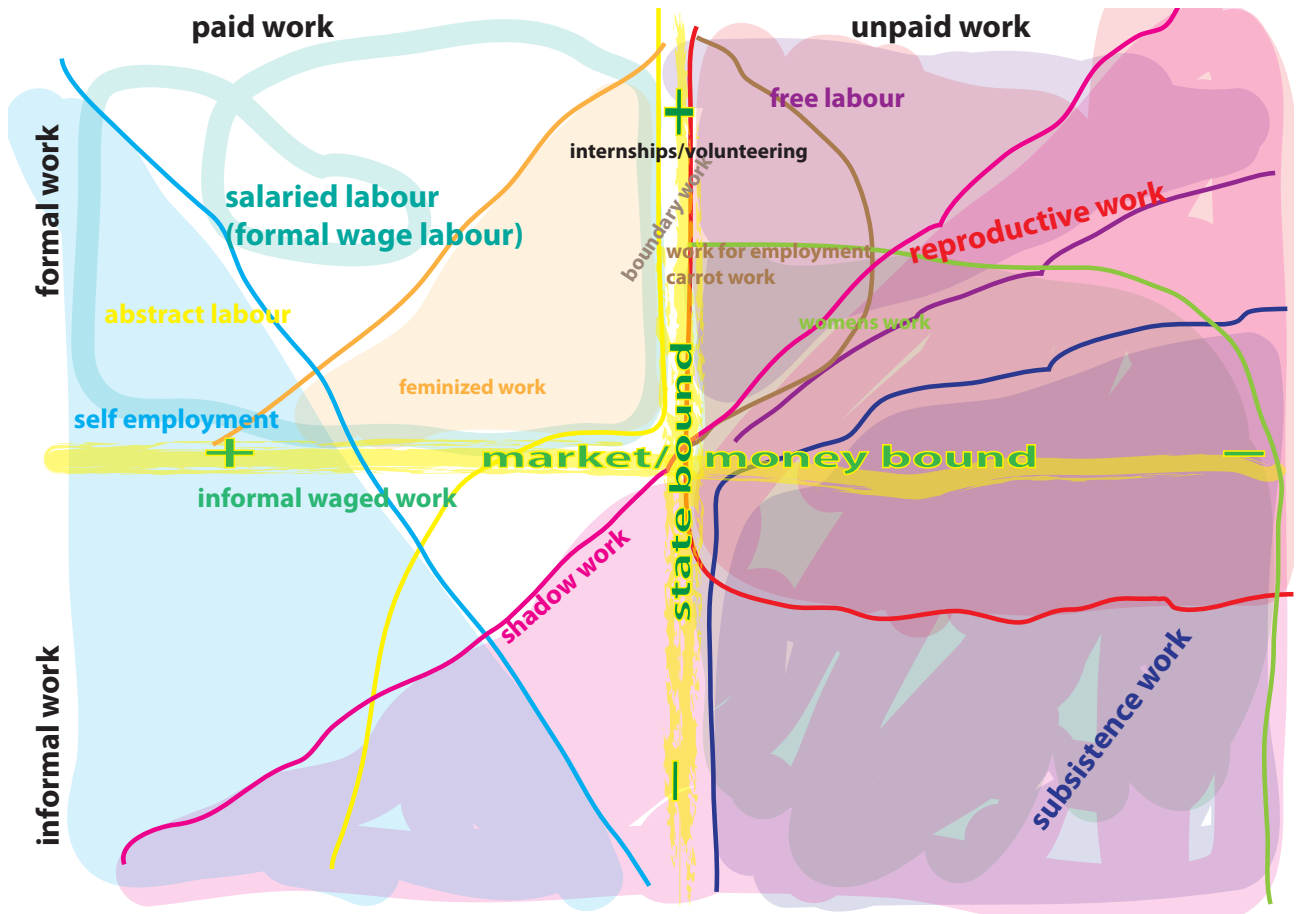
Family.

This then leads me to a key question, in relation to the ways in which work-life is based in networks in my research context: how does the network relate to the family? What do bonds of care mean in the network – what kinds of care networks do we invent to sustain our life and work, and how do we negotiate these with flexibility, opportunistic and competitive cultures? How do we negotiate care in our movements across borders, as workers and militants? My interviews revolve around this question of care networks, and how people live these according to their different employment, familial, health- and citizenship-related situations – not least as part of a feminist politics that struggles to supersede the patriarchal and hierarchical family and invent other models in its place. The desire to invent other kinds of families, other kinds of care networks, is one of the key things that speaks from interviews quoted in Chapters B.2, B.3 and C.2 notably. If the network contains the paradigmatic neoliberal formula for exploitation, it also contains the paradigmatic formula for facilitating survival where one has no access to institutions, welfare, steady employment or rights – for survival within precarity, to put it one way. As such, networks make resistance possible as much as they engender many

¹¹ Alemi, Mario [director] (2006) ‘History did not end’, Documentary, Brasil. Portugese/Italian with english subtitles. Online at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6699809913287688781> (The quote can be found in the first minutes of the Video)

new forms of capitalist exploitation: in the moment of economic and social crisis, there are many open and ambivalent questions regarding networks. There are as many relational modes being invented to meet them: this thesis tries to undertake a modest exploration of some of those.

Appendix 5: Diagram of Modes of Work in relations to State and Market (in Capitalism)



Appendix 6: Autonomism and post-Fordism

Theories of the ‘feminisation of work’ point to a becoming-woman of labour, meaning the flexibilisation and precarization of work, as well as pointing to the expansion of affective industries in the service sector. Such analyses are useful in that they allow us to draw historical parallels between different processes of primitive accumulation, and open a perspective on women’s and subaltern work and struggles, a blind spot of much Marxist and other critical thought about work.

Revel speaks of a becoming-woman of labour as moment of potential as well as subordination: moving off the stage and thus away from the visibility, protection, valorization and unity it affords. Theatre is the mirror of a society that is essentially male and bourgeois: in its mirroring operations, it is no surprise that false identifications prevail not just between working class and bourgeoisie, but also between production and reproduction: the representational machinery of patriarchal capitalism likes to make the former see itself becoming the latter.

The positioning within this theatre indeed enables or disables certain perspectives on work and its ‘others’, and many Marxist analyses suffer from being stuck in the auditorium, or at best uttered from the stage towards the auditorium, reporting what is going on behind the scenes. If Marx’s great move was to shift the gaze from markets and economies towards ‘the hidden abode of production’¹, analyzing the way capitalism structures work and production, then the matter at hand here concerns the hidden abode of reproduction, and the new ways in which capitalism currently structures, restructures and undoes reproduction. The lens of post-Fordism, like the one of Fordism it refers to, remains structured around a male and wage-based understanding of work – while its contributions towards an analysis of contemporary transformations of wage labour and industry are indispensable, I follow Nick Dyer Whiteford’s suggestion of new territories to be addressed by autonomism, dwelling on perspectives of reproduction and care:

[...] this passage from the factory to the social factory brings with it issues unmapped by traditional Marxism, putting at stake not just the wage but the

1 See Marx, K. (1867) *Capital*, Vol.1, *Chapter 6: The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power*.

social wage; not just productive but reproductive labour; not just the shop floor but education and culture; not just industrial hazards but environmental pollution. Struggles at each site manifest their own specificity or ‘singularity’.²

The theorizations coming out of Autonomia have made it possible to envisage the current cycle of labour transformation in view to self-organisation. While greatly valuing the Autonomia movement³, its theoretical children and its contributions to creative forms of militancy, I want to provocatively propose an affirmation of heteronomy, of the recognition of interdependence, here, in passing via more feminist readings. It tends to be feminist and de-colonial or subaltern struggles that grasp the complexity and interconnections of a politics of auto- as well as heteronomy. The limit to how far orthodox – and to some extent certainly also classical – Marxism can take analyses of care, reproduction and free labour is somewhat based in an undervaluing of the interdependencies that hold communities and everyday lives together.

The contributions of Autonomia movements need to be mentioned here not least because they strongly impact on contemporary practices of creative resistance. The 1970s and 80s saw practices of refusal of labour and creative revolt come to fruition, inspiring large numbers of people in the attempt at building another relation between work and life. Particularly in Italy, post-68 forms of refusal of labour and creative revolt were flourishing⁴. The various theoretical movements of Autonomist thought spoke of virtuosity⁵, cognitive or affective labour as holding potential for a differential mode of relating to work and life, shaping new radical subjectivities. Such writings of Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Franco Berardi and Mario Tronti amongst others have had a strong influence on recent cultures of collaboration and collectivity in the field of creative

2 See Dyer Whiteford, N. (2004) *Autonomous Marxism and the Information Society*.

3 By ‘Autonomia’ I am referring to the currents of Marxist thought and struggle emerging from the Italian 1970s Autonomist movements (the groups Potere Operaio or Lotta Continua for instance, the theorist Antonio Negri or Mario Tronti for instance). - and beyond it, more recent (post-)autonomous perspectives. I am referring to the broader legacy and context of this movement also however, as a field of workerist struggle that harboured creative experiments such as Radio Alice, a station where Bifo and sometimes Guattari’s voices could be heard, and to the post-Autonomist theorists Paolo Virno, Bifo or Maurizio Lazzarato. This is a men’s movement, which spurred feminist breakoffs with its machist culture and was thus in an uneasy relationship with the Italian feminist movements erupting around the same time. Related theorists include Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati, Silvia Federici, Alisa Del Re: I do not include them when I refer to ‘Autonomia’ here however, but rather speak of them as feminists. See for instance Dalla Costa, M. () *The door to the garden: Feminismo and Operaismo*.

4 See for instance: Lotringer, S. r. and C. Marazzi (2008). *Autonomia : post-political politics*. Cambridge, Mass ; London, Semiotext(e).

5 See Virno, Paolo (2004), *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Bertoletti, I., Cascaito, J. and Casson, A. New York: Sémiotexte.

labour and art. The impulse of self-organization and collective creativity that marked moments such as those of Radio Alice⁶ have inspired many cultural workers to rethink their practices in political ways⁷. These theorizations have oriented thought and production in the cultural sector in fruitful ways: they have provided a sharp analysis of the entrepreneurial work ethic that underpins post-Fordist capitalism, the merging of work and life, of employer and employee, and offered examples of other possible modes of organizing work and struggle.⁸

Sometimes in tune, sometimes in dissonance with feminist movements of the 1970s, it is important to keep in mind and conversation the Autonomist and women's struggles, since they address two dimensions of working and living realities that constitute the spectrum of our economic organisations. The concept of precarity, in its Autonomist emphasis as well as its pointing towards women's and subaltern struggle, offers an opportunity to combine such perspectives to some extent.

6 See for instance the history of 'Radio Alice' in Bologna, one center around which much this activity crystallized: an online archive of its activities can be found at: <http://www.radioalice.org>.

7 An interesting example of a new media activist platform working along those lines is www.kein.org

8 See particularly the online Journals of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, *Transform* and *Transversal*, at: www.eipcp.net

Appendix 7 - Economies of contribution

A more recent voice that has made itself heard on matters of digital and networked collaboration is that of Bernard Stiegler. This French scholar is hopeful about collaborative cultures and their capacities to build autonomous circuits of production, dwelling on technics and emphasising organisational dynamics beyond the left (which leaves him, in my opinion, stuck within a liberal bourgeois spectrum). There is a multitude of accounts of how networked technologies both enable and enslave. Digital technologies and the internet not only change the way we look, apply and compete for work, or the ways we execute contracted or formal work: but also the ways share, communicate, relate, associate, move and perceive. Stiegler laments the increasing proletarianization of *life* that capitalism still implies – ‘proletarianization’ being a matter of losing access to the knowledge that allows us to do things and to exist¹. Just like industrial capitalism proletarianized ‘work’ – taking away our capacity to make, collaborate, self-organise and draw meaning from our labours (or ‘savoir faire’) – consumerist capitalism has proletarianized our capacity to live, our ‘savoir vivre’, making us dependent on consumption as a compensation for meaningful life. Stiegler says we need to contest

[...] the new form of proletarianization consisting in the organization of consumption as the destruction of savoir-vivre with the aim of creating available purchasing power, thereby refining and reinforcing the system which rested on the destruction of savoir-faire with the aim of creating available labour force².

His argument points to a de facto impoverishment of everyday and collective intelligence, and as such potentially points to important investigations into contemporary life and its forms of solidarity and reproduction. But, as the refrain here goes, Stiegler ends up with a relatively limited critique that speaks from the position of formal labour only – even if it is now not just wages but also flexibilized, fee-based and precarious labour that is at stake. Yet he is clear about the poverty of cognitive labour:

1 As such, there is a key difference between proletarianization and pauperization: proletarianization is about access to knowledge and meaning-making, while pauperization is about the withdrawal of means to survive. Where proletarianization deprives of libidinal energy, withdrawing the desire to live, pauperization is the material-bodily aspect of deprivation, withdrawing the necessary material conditions for sustaining life as zoe. See also:

Stiegler, B. (2010): *For a new critique of Political Economy*, pp. 36 – 41.

2 Ibid, p.27

We thus have *pure cognitive labour power utterly devoid of knowledge*: with cognitive technologies, it is the cognitive itself which has been proletarianized. In this consists, then, cognitive capitalism, also known as ‘creative’ or ‘immaterial’ capitalism. And this is concretely expressed in the fact that *the cognitive has been reduced to calculability – logos* has become, pharmacologically and economically, *ratio*³.

Yet Stiegler does not look beyond this ‘cognitive’ field towards cultures of knowledge and sharing. As ‘economies of contribution’ he imagines modes of networked postfordist production that put resources in common: however this still seems to be mainly about the sharing of ideas and IPs in generally competitive settings, a narrative by and for white educated males in industrialized countries of the west⁴. Reading Stiegler’s *New Critique of Political Economy*, one finds many sensitivities and intuitions, yet he insists on projecting new political economies into cognitarian fields rather than elsewhere. Missing out on the wealth of self-generating knowledges in the experiences of women and subaltern people, Stiegler also fails to address the repression and deprivation of reproductive knowledges that have occurred with colonization, housewifization and capitalist accumulation across the globe and centuries. Whether women and the subaltern have a different point of view on contemporary ‘proletarianization’ remains unknown: a promising story reverts to its usual protagonists.

The economy of contribution stands for an economy of communalist relations that reclaims technologies and knowledges of work in ways that make both economics and work more meaningful – in Stiegler’s case (as with of so many theorists of ‘cognitive’, ‘immaterial’, ‘creative’ or ‘knowledge’ labour), this is supposed to happen via the emergence of digital technologies and computer networks. Through them, ‘work’ can emancipate itself and regain creativity and meaning, according to Stiegler. He does have a conception of work as the constant re-invention of meaning at the interface of the psychic, social and political, yet what revolutionary potential can be derived from such a white middle class niche of cultural work? Is this really where the potentials to break

3 Ibid, p.46

4 Much like Paolo Virnos theories of the virtuosic multitude, Stiegler praises what Bifo would call the ‘cognitariat’ for being the exception to this rule of proletarianization.

with proletarianization have a privileged place today? What about the 99% of others, who restlessly push buttons in call-centres, offices and home workstations – not to mention the many non-informatic, so called unskilled workers?

Situating hopeful theories of post-fordism and contribution

Like many philosophically and scientifically positioned theorisations, Stiegler's too presents a relative monofocal perspective which ends up resembling a 'god trick' in Donna Haraway's terms – a perspective that fails to articulate itself in relation to its place, its others, its history in a thoroughly critical way. Donna Haraway calls for developing situated knowledges in the face of disembodied objectivity:

We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate colour and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name⁵.

The absence of a feminist and postcolonial viewpoint – or even recognition thereof – does make itself felt in Stiegler's work, and with this, the questions of care and sustainability that he discusses with high moral stakes become somewhat shallow. Reproduction and the feminised everyday are finally left behind in favour of the conceptual pair production/consumption⁶: Stiegler's 'care' remains too abstract a concept, without much indication of a practice beyond that of certain people working with computers. To be sure, his notion of care sits in a pivotal place, addressing an absence of certain practices of attention-giving within contemporary networked capitalism, and pointing to the need to invent new ways of putting things in common:

The economy of contribution is the stimulation of desire through the reconstitution of systems of care founded on contemporary pharmaka and constituting a new commerce of subsistences in the service of a new existence⁷.

5 Haraway, D. (1988). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3).
p.582

6 Cameron, Jenny and Gibson-Graham, J.K (2003). 'Feminising the economy: metaphors, strategies, politics' *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10: 2

7 Stiegler, Bernard (2010), *For a new critique of political economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press. p.121

Yet how to imagine ‘subsistences’ without an attention to reproduction, to care in its proper embodiment? As the Heideggerian concept of *Sorge* on which he draws heavily, Stiegler’s ‘care’ is blind to how any mode of care is internally and antagonistically split according to class, gender and race. Like many Marxist theorisations of labour, it overlooks the very activities that make life - and production and consumption – sustainable. The ‘economy of contribution’ sits rather awkwardly with women as mothers, wives, witches, carers or prostitutes who have developed and passed on an incredible wealth of knowledges, pedagogies and practices of care and communisation, despite having little access to mainstream institutions, public spaces or high technologies. It also sits strangely with cultures going through violent cycles of accumulation to supposedly arrive at the techno-individual of Stiegler’s narrative.

Interestingly, in relation to questions of care, Stiegler points out that spaces of collaboration are not a matter of *autonomy* merely: a point missing in many Autonomist and network theories that are purely affirmative of digital collaboration. This questioning of autonomy is a point feminists have made for decades, in speaking about an ethics of care, vulnerability and interdependency. What is at stake, what we must invent, is a way of thinking autonomy and heteronomy together: if we think ‘economies of contribution’ as spaces of both creativity and care, of interdependency as well as self-determination, and if we think the beyond the experiences of creative or cognitive labourers. Within Stiegler’s work, the frame of reference remains the state and an idea of encouraging spaces modelled on digital cooperation via policy⁸: no touching upon non-industrial work, no referent beyond a bourgeois male subject, no rapport to embodied practices.

8 See Stiegler’s *Ars Industrialis* initiative, for instance: www.arsindustrialis.org

Appendix 8: Networked resistance and governance

Global neoliberal capitalism+governance, networked resistance movements

	governance/state/market	key times and places	resistance movements
IMF WTO	global neoliberal economic policies deregulation	late 1990s - 2004 approx.	Global Social Movement/Alter-globalization: 1999 seattle anti WTO summit protest anti G8/G20 protests in Genova (2001) Heiligendamm (2007), London (2009), etc.
EU	EU policies reconfiguring labour markets and rights; eg. Creative Industries model, Bologna Process = precarity appears	2004-2008 approx. (earlier in south EU)	EuroMayDay (2001 Milan; mainly 2004-2010); Precarias a la Deriva (2004-2008); Serpica Naro(2005-ongoing); Coordination Intermittents+Precaires (2003-ongoing)
onset recession	onset neoliberal crisis; precarity settles locally, increasingly also in north; neoliberal dismantling of welfare and financialisation proceeds	2008-2010 approx. (earlier in south EU)	more Precarity Collectives: Carrot Workers/PWB, 9to5, SConnectioni Precarie, Prekaer Café, ... V de Vivienda Spain (2007)
finance state	housing bubbles burst, debt crisis, precarity intensifies, first cuts to education and culture		student movements: Onda Anomala Italy 2009 UniBrennt Austria 2009; UK Student Mvt 2010; Primavera Valenciana Spain 2011; etc.
state, IMF, WTO...	right wing governments are elected austerity policies start coming through faltering economies and despotic elites in north africa..	notably 2011	North African Revolutions, 15M movement Anti-austerity mobilizations in EU Occupy Wall Street, Occupy London and other cities (2011)
	in EU-south: loops of bailouts and rescue plans austerity attacks social services and health, new poverty lines	2011-ongoing	New Commoning and Alter-Economic(?), Pro-democratic Movements.....
	growing support for left wing parties	2012,13, ..	

